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Everybody's

FIRST IN FICTION

JANUARY
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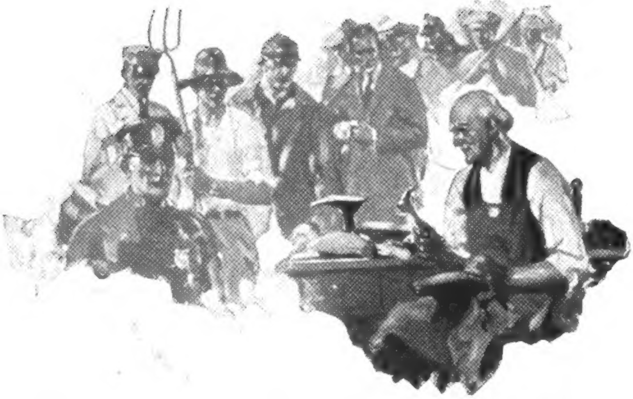
A Story
Great Thrills
E DOUBLE HOUSE
Elizabeth Dejeans

Chas. A. MacLellan

LLIAM ASHLEY ANDERSON'S *Complete Novelette,* EDWINA LEVIN
CDONALD, ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN, ARTHUR B. REEVE *(Craig*
nedy), MICHAEL ARLEN, ARTEMUS CALLOWAY, ELIZABAIA
DEUSEN, FRANCIS LYNDE, JOHN T.



The men who are hardest on shoes will tell you why—*Nothing takes the place of Leather!*

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"Yes, I've tried all sorts of things for soles and heels and I've come to the conclusion that when you try to imitate nature or go her one better you're getting in over your head and hands.

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"New shoes last me five or six months, and then I have them resoled and they are good for the rest of the year. Generally I have them rebuilt once more, and that means another five months' hard wear. When you tramp a beat for hours like I do, you want your feet to feel comfortable, and you don't want to feel the pavement through them. So, I make sure that they have solid leather soles and heels. Nothing else is near so easy on the feet. I have tried other things once or twice; but I stick to leather now."

It is only natural that these men should find, through their practical experience, that "nothing takes the place of leather" for them. Leather is composed of thousands of tiny elastic fibres, tunneled with pores. Muscles can move under leather. Feet can breathe—yet, they are kept warm. That is why leather-shod feet are comfortable—comfortable after hours of walking. And that is why leather wears and wears as nothing else can. Leather is nature's product, nothing can take the place of it.

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Everybody's

NUMBER ONE JANUARY, 1924 VOLUME L

If It's in Everybody's It's a Good Story

CONTENTS

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

Saved by Grace WILLIAM ASHLEY ANDERSON 113
Illustration by JOSEPH A. MATURO

EIGHT SHORT STORIES

Hissing Terror ARTEMUS CALLOWAY 32
Illustration by ROBERT A. GRAEF

The Log EDWINA LEVIN MacDONALD 37
Illustration by B. NEY

Unto the Children (See page 182) AUSTIN HALL 49

The Jazz Addict ARTHUR B. REEVE 59
Illustration by HAROLD ANDERSON

Half a Man (See page 183) ELIZABETH VAN DEUSEN 89
Illustration by J. M. CLEMENT

The Jungle-Thing (See page 184) EUGENE CUNNINGHAM 103

Self-Respect ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN 163

The Lark Among Crows MICHAEL ARLEN 174

THREE SERIALS

The Double House ELIZABETH DEJEANS 11
Illustrations by ERNEST FUHR

Mellowing Money FRANCIS LYNDE 72
Illustration by J. M. CLEMENT

Kildare of the Border JOHN T. McINTYRE 133
Illustrations by CHARLES HARGENS

OTHER FEATURES—Everybody's Chimney Corner, 180; Prose and Worse, by Gridley Adams, 185; Everybody's Chestnut Tree, 187; Cover Design by Charles A. MacLellan.

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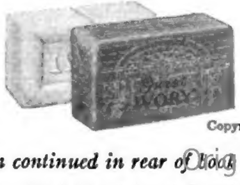

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Advertising section continued in rear of book

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How Often Do Lawyers Thwart Justice? Beginning a New Mystery Novel

The Double House

Near a Quiet Adirondack Summer Resort a Woman's Shriek Is Heard and Elaine Dascome Vanishes; Months Later Her Body Is Found, Barely Recognizable. Did the Eminent Attorney John Dascome Murder Her for His Father-in-Law's Fortune?

By Elizabeth Dejeans

Illustrations by Ernest Fuhr

JOHN DASCOME had watched the coming and the passing of two springs through the barred window of a cell. In the spring of the previous year, he had been accused of the murder of his wife, Elaine Proctor Dascome. The Dascome case had been before the public for more than a year.

John Dascome was a well-known lawyer and came of a good Massachusetts family. He had gone from the New England public schools to a law school in New York. He had made a study of criminal jurisprudence, and had soon proved his aptitude in his specialty. In the eight years that followed, Dascome was steadily successful. It was said that he was bent upon making a fortune and that he had married Elaine Proctor because of her father's wealth. It was well known that there was an intimate friendship between him and Amos Proctor, his father-in-law, a multimillionaire cotton-mill owner.

Dascome was twenty-four when he married Elaine Proctor, and she was twenty-two, a little wide-eyed thing of flowerlike beauty and great charm—when she chose to exert it. She had had an unusual history. Utterly unlike her correct sister, Aimée (the sisters were twins), Elaine had been a daring and headstrong girl, increasingly erratic as she grew older, and given to tempests of passion. When she was eighteen years old, she wanted to go on the stage and her family opposed her. Then suddenly she had married Alexander Karesia, a Russian and a well-known socialist, declaring that henceforth she was of the proletariat. During a strike in the Proctor mills, she proclaimed herself an anarchist, and only her father's influence saved her from arrest.

Her romance, if it might be called such, was short-lived: within eighteen months she wearied of both her husband and anarchy and returned to her father. A year later Alexander Karesia died and, shortly afterward, John Dascome met Elaine Karesia at the home of Mrs. Ormsby, her sister, who had married a New York man of some social prominence. Dascome's courtship was a brief one; he married Elaine Karesia six weeks after he met her. A year later their daughter, Clarice, was born.

Apparently during the earlier years of their marriage there were few disagreements, but, later, there were many. They were completely at odds over Clarice's education. Dascome advocated public-school training and the usual mingling with other children; his wife insisted upon private instructors and a secluded life and that the child should be her constant companion.

Dascome objected to this for their child, and Elaine's bitter retort was that he was jealous because Clarice cared more for her than she did for her father. Clarice was precocious, and very like her mother in some ways, reckless when thwarted or angry, and very self-willed. The family upheavals were many; Elaine's constant accusation was that Dascome's one object in life was to take Clarice away from her, and Dascome saw almost nothing of his child. Twice Elaine left her husband's house, taking Clarice with her. The first time, she went to her father in Proctorville, Massachusetts, but when told by him that he was entirely in sympathy with Dascome, she returned to her home. A year later, a few days before her father's death, she declared in a climax of passion that she was going to take Clarice and leave Dascome forever.

As a general thing, when his wife flew into a rage, Dascome either preserved absolute silence or left the house. Most of his life was spent in his office, at his athletic club, or at his country club; he was a grave-faced, quiet young man, well built and muscular, and always in training. He had a gift of expression which he reserved for courtroom occasions; ordinarily he was an uncommunicative sort of man, very steady-eyed and grave; forcible enough when aroused. For several years, he and his wife had occupied separate rooms and, latterly, they met only at the evening meal and then only occasionally.

IT WAS on such an occasion that Elaine Dascome told her husband that she was going to leave him forever and take Clarice with her, and Dascome broke his long silence and Clarice and the servants were witnesses to a scene.

Dascome said to his wife: "Your lack of self-control is making a maniac of you, Elaine, and under your training Clarice is becoming a fit subject for a reformatory. It is abominable what you have done to our child and, so surely as you live, you will be punished for it. You have no regard for God or man. You know that in your father's state of health, if you take Clarice away as you threaten, it will kill him. Can't you at least allow your father to have a peaceful passing? I warn you to be careful what you do! I have been patient for a long time, but I shall not be patient forever. If you take Clarice from my house, I shall do unto you as you deserve. There have been times, Elaine, when I have been angry enough to kill you, but there are worse things in this world than simply dying."

Nevertheless, that evening, April the fourth, Elaine Dascome left her husband's house, taking Clarice and her personal maid with her, and went to a hotel. The next morning, her father, in Proctorville, received a telegram from her saying that she had left Dascome forever and demanding that her father send her money at once, that she "hadn't a cent." The Dascome servants said that, on the night of her departure, Dascome walked the floor until morning.

The next morning, April the fifth, Dascome received a long-distance telephone call from Proctorville, the nature of which he did not disclose. Immediately afterward, he went to the hotel where his wife was and went to her apartment unannounced. She and Clarice were alone, for the maid had gone on an errand. When the maid returned, Dascome discharged her abruptly, in the presence of his wife, who seemed to be entirely subject to his will.

In the meantime, Clarice had gone to her aunt, Mrs. Ormsby, saying that she had run away from the hotel and was afraid to go back because her father and mother were having a fearful quarrel. When her aunt, alarmed, called her sister's apartment, Dascome answered the telephone and said that there had been no quarrel and that he and Elaine were going to Crisomby Lakes that evening. Mrs. Ormsby insisted that she must speak to Elaine, and Elaine came to the telephone and said in a lifeless way: "Yes, we're going to Crisomby. Please look after Clarice for a while." Then she rang off abruptly.

That evening, April the fifth, taking several servants with them, Dascome and his wife left for Crisomby Lakes, reaching there late that night. At one o'clock the next day, April the sixth, Dascome received another long-distance telephone call. He told no one what the message was. A few minutes later, he took his wife out on the lake in a rowboat, saying to the servants that he intended to return in time to take the train to Proctorville. An hour later, he returned to the house without his wife, his clothing soaking wet and without his hat. He told the servants that in getting out of the boat he had fallen into the water. A telegram had come for him and Dascome read it but told no one what the message was. He changed his clothes in great haste and hurriedly left the house for the station, without saying anything about his wife.

Meanwhile, in Proctorville, on the morning of April the fifth, Amos Proctor had received the telegram which his daughter had sent him from the hotel in New York on the night of the fourth, saying that she was leaving Dascome forever, and the shock had caused a heart attack. The next morning, April the sixth, Amos Proctor was so seriously ill that his physician telegraphed to Mrs. Ormsby and Elaine Dascome to come to their father at once. The telegram to Mrs. Ormsby was delivered promptly, but the telegram to Elaine Dascome had to be forwarded to Crisomby and did not reach Crisomby until after Dascome had left, and several hours after Amos Proctor had died. He died at noon of April the sixth, an hour before Dascome received the long-distance telephone call from Proctorville, just after which he took his wife out on the lake.

The next morning, April the seventh, Dascome appeared at the Proctor house in Proctorville; said that he had come on business and had only heard of Mr. Proctor's illness and death at the station. When he told Mrs. Ormsby that the physician's telegram to Elaine probably reached Crisomby shortly after he had started on his business trip to Proctorville, it was taken for granted by Mrs. Ormsby that her sister was on her way to Proctorville and would arrive some time that day.

BUT Elaine Dascome did not come. Instead, that evening, Mrs. Ormsby received a communication from the sheriff of Crisomby County that Elaine Dascome had been missing from her home since the afternoon of the day before, April the sixth, and that he feared foul play.

He said that just after Mr. Dascome had left his Crisomby house to go to the station, a boy had come running to the Dascome house and had told the servants that an hour before, while baiting his rabbit traps at the lower end of the lake, he had heard a woman on the lake scream as if she were being choked. He had shouted and had run to the lakeside and there saw the Dascome rowboat floating away from the collection of driftwood at the extreme end of the lake, called the Dragon's Pool. Then he saw some one swimming toward the willows on the opposite shore, a man who seemed to be trying to escape observation by swimming under water, and then the man had hidden himself under the overhanging growth of willows.

The sheriff said that they had examined the bank above the willows and that certainly no one had got out of the water there, but farther along they had found a place which was still wet and foot-tracked, and that there was a trail of footprints leading from that spot toward the Dascome house. He had compared the footprints with the shoes Dascome had taken off at the house, and there was no doubt that the footprints were made by those shoes. His party had searched the lake shores thoroughly, but had discovered nothing further that threw light on the suspected tragedy. He had not attempted to search the pool, for it was very deep and dangerous. Mrs. Ormsby told all this to the local authorities and Dascome was questioned and finally, at the request of the sheriff at Crisomby, held.

Amos Proctor's will afforded one motive for the crime. It gave his daughter, Aimée Ormsby, ten million dollars; his daughter, Elaine Dascome, the income of ten million dollars, to be held in trust by the —— Trust Company of New York, during her lifetime, and paid to her monthly. To his granddaughter, Clarice Dascome, went ten million dollars, to be held in trust for her by the —— Trust Company of New York, until she reached the age of eighteen.

To his son-in-law, John Dascome, two hundred thousand dollars was left outright, and there were also smaller bequests to relatives, friends and charities, aggregating one hundred thousand dollars.

The will further provided that should John Dascome survive Elaine Dascome, the ten million which had been held in trust during the lifetime of Elaine Dascome should be paid to John Dascome. Should John Dascome not survive Elaine Dascome, on her death her ten million dollars should be equally divided between Aimée Ormsby, or her heirs, and Clarice Dascome, or her heirs.

The will further provided that should Elaine Dascome at any time become incapacitated or, for any reason, be unable to administer her own affairs, the ten millions held in trust should be paid to John Dascome to use as his judgment should direct. Should that contingency arise, and should John Dascome not be living at that time, the —— Trust Company of New York was to act as guardian for Elaine Dascome and pay such sums as were necessary for her maintenance, and for all luxuries and pleasures which were deemed necessary for her health, comfort, and well-being.

FOR month after month John Dascome, although he had been promptly indicted, was in effect held only under suspicion. It was freely predicted that nothing more would happen, so well did Crisomby Lake conceal the secret it held in its deep bosom.

There are two Crisomby lakes, Upper and Lower Crisomby. Upper Crisomby is the more beautiful lake and is fed by a lovely stream, and the summer cottages are on Upper Crisomby. In this lake is a bend which hides the extreme end of the lake from any habitation, and this secluded end of the lake juts out into the half mile of dense undergrowth which lies between the two lakes. Here the lake is narrow, an oval inlet about a hundred and fifty feet in width. The banks around it are high, in places overhanging, and at its lower end there is an eddy which collects light driftwood and floating matter.

It is well known that there must be an underground channel connecting the two lakes. Sometimes small animals drowned in Upper Crisomby have been found in Lower Crisomby. The supposition that from Lower Crisomby there is a channel seeping into the Hudson seems a reasonable explanation for the suction which draws objects from the upper lake into the lower.

But, though there are on record several cases of drowning in Upper Crisomby, never had a human body, or the body of any large animal, been recovered from Upper Crisomby, and never had such a body drowned in the upper lake been found in the lower. The explanation was that the underground channel would draw into its mouth a human body and suction into the lower lake would keep it there because the channel was too narrow to allow of its passage into the other lake. The lower end of Upper Crisomby Lake with its tiny maelstrom is supposed to be directly over the opening into the underground channel which leads into the lower lake.

Could Upper Crisomby be forced to give up its dead? Mrs. Ormsby vowed that it should and she had a fortune at her command; she spared no expense in her efforts to recover the body of her sister. Days, weeks, months passed. Upper Crisomby was dragged and redragged, in so far as was possible, for it proved to have a bed of rocks. Then divers were engaged to explore the lower portion of the lake and they reported that the lake had a fissure-like bottom edged with sharp rocks, which no diver would dare to explore, as he would certainly be wedged between its sides; that the extension of this fissure was doubtless the channel leading into the other lake, but that was a matter which they were quite willing to leave to the Creator. Experts in deep-water salvage accompanied the divers and reported that, in their opinion, dynamiting the bottom of the lake, or any like attempt to drive to the surface a body that might be lodged in the fissure would only bury it beneath heaps of rock.

It seemed probable that the case against John Dascome, such as it was, would be dropped. His counsel were working strenuously to that end when Lower Crisomby played traitor to her twin—from the mud at the lower end of Lower Crisomby a farmer named Culp fished a small buckled shoe and a search of Lower Crisomby at once began. The secrets of this lake were buried in mud, but, finally, there was dragged out of the slime a something which was believed to be Elaine Dascome; the friction the body had undergone in its passage through the jagged channel and the decomposition resulting from weeks of rest in a muddy bed accounted for its battered and almost fleshless condition; the shreds of clothing that clung to the mass had been Elaine Dascome's and about the throat was wound still the heavy-linked gold chain which she had worn when she went for the fatal journey on the lake. Attached to it was an empty leather pouch, the sort of soft leather bag in which a woman carries money or jewels. Elaine Dascome was a tiny woman, the others who had perished in Upper Crisomby were men; Elaine Dascome had passed through the Dragon's Throat. Immediately, now, John Dascome was brought to trial.

THE most important witness for the prosecution was the boy who had first given the alarm. This boy, Jimmy Calhoun, was sixteen years old, a bright-faced, intelligent lad who had been born in Crisomby village. He bore a good name and his parents were honest, hard-working people. He was questioned and requestioned, but his testimony could not be shaken.

He told the court: "I'd baited my rabbit traps and found new places for them a little ways off the wagon road that runs between the two lakes and on through the fields to the Culp farm. Then I heard the scream. It was screechy, like a woman's scream and sort of choky and gurgling. Right away I thought a woman must be hurt and have fallen in the pool. I just lifted up and shouted as loud as I could, then ran through the underbrush to the lake, and I came out on the bank straight across from where the driftwood stuff banks up, about seventy-five feet from it. That driftwood stuff is about midway between where I came out at and the other bank across the lake.

"I couldn't see anybody at first, only that mess of driftwood stuff looked all stirred up, like some one had fell into it; and I saw a woman's hat sticking up in it, like as if she had lost off her hat when she fell into the water, and I saw the Dascomes' rowboat drifting off from the driftwood place. Then I saw that there was a wake in the water, going away from the driftwood, like there is when any one swims under water, some one swimming fast. Then, just for a minute, I saw a man's head lift up out of the water, the back of his head, and saw it duck down again and the stir in the water going straight on for the clump of willows, straight across the lake from me.

"I watched maybe three or four minutes, but he didn't get up on the bank and I guessed he was hidden under the willows. I was scared, for I was sure something wrong had happened, so I ran hard as I could back to the road going to the Culp place. Mrs. Culp was there, but Culp and the hired man had gone to Crisomby for a load of hay. She was scared like me and told me to run quick to the Dascome house and tell them it was their boat I saw and that something had happened on the lake.

"I was too scared to go past the Pool again, so I ran round the upper part of the lake to the Dascome house. The servants said that Mr. Dascome had just gone to the train. They was scared and the cook said she was going to call the sheriff. Then I went home and told mother. Then the sheriff come along and I told him, and him and me and some others, we started for the lake. Culp and his hired man had got back from Crisomby with their hay and they come over to the lake and we all hunted around. We found where a man had got out of the water, farther up the lake, and the things in the driftwood."

The prosecution had made tests showing how long it would take the boy to walk from his home to the rough wagon road between the two lakes and, according to their calculation, he had reached the road at about a quarter past one. They established that Dascome had taken his wife out on the lake at a quarter past one. Accompanied by competent witnesses, the boy had gone through what he had done on that afternoon, had baited his traps and had placed them, and this had taken him less than half an hour. They established that Dascome had returned to his house in a dripping wet condition at half past two. From the measurements of his stride taken from his footprints leading from the lake shore to his house, he must have walked rapidly, and a man going at that speed would cover the distance in ten minutes, so Dascome must have been on the lake when the boy heard the scream, which the prosecution claimed was at about a quarter to two.

The defense could not overthrow Jimmy Calhoun's testimony. He was positive that it was a man's head that had lifted from the water. All the defense could get from him was that he did not know who the man was; he had seen only the back and the top of the bead. Dascome had fair hair; Jimmy Calhoun said that the man's hair looked brown. The prosecution asked, "Like light hair when it is wet?" The boy thought that it did—it looked brownish.

No, he had not thought that it was Mr. Dascome's head; he knew only that it was a man's head; he couldn't tell at all whose head it was.

The prosecution asked him if he had ever seen Mr. Dascome swim under water? The lad was reluctant, but they drew from him that Mr. Dascome could swim a long way under water; that sometimes Mr. Dascome showed the boys how far he could swim under water; that Mr. Dascome was a splendid swimmer, and that Mrs. Dascome could not swim at all. Jimmy Calhoun looked miserable while he gave this testimony; it was evident that he liked Dascome.

The prosecution alleged a double motive for the crime of which they accused John Dascome; namely, the determination to be rid of his wife and at the same time to secure a fortune. To fortify their claim that the worm will turn and that when a worm of John Dascome's nature turns a tragedy is the result, they cited an occurrence in Dascome's career. During the Devereux trial, which won him his first fame, Dascome had received a number of threatening letters. Dascome had traced these letters to a man named Atwell. Then, instead of turning the man over to the law, Dascome had caught the man alone and had beaten him within an inch of his life. Dascome was reputed to be terrible when enraged. Asserting that Dascome had taken revenge upon his wife, the prosecution exploited the erratic character and exasperating conduct of Elaine Dascome: how for years Dascome had been harassed and abused by his wife. They laid great stress on Dascome's outburst when his wife had told him that she was going to leave him forever and take Clarice with her.

MRS. ORMSBY testified, somewhat loftily, that she had kept out of the Dascome quarrels as much as possible, but that on one occasion she had heard her sister say to Dascome: "You are simply biding your time until you can get rid of me and have Clarice to yourself. If it weren't for father, you wouldn't wait a minute—you'd quickly put an end to me."

Mrs. Ormsby's testimony was to the effect that her sister was in deadly fear of Dascome, also that Dascome had had great influence with Amos Proctor, her father; that Dascome influenced Amos Proctor in all sorts of ways, in money matters, and in matters that concerned herself and Elaine; that Dascome influenced Amos Proctor to such an extent that he had sided always with Dascome against Elaine. Mrs. Ormsby said very positively that she had never considered her sister irresponsible, only hot-tempered and self-willed at times.

Meta Thail, Elaine Dascome's maid, whom Dascome had summarily discharged, proved a good witness for the prosecution. She was a small, frail, faded woman of forty-five, with large, sad blue eyes and a timid manner. There was an air of refinement about her, and there were vestiges of beauty in her face; evidently she had been a very pretty girl of much the same type as Elaine Dascome, fair, petite, and large-eyed. She had grown up in the Proctor mills, a child laborer in the pre-reform days; then she had married a mill hand; later, her husband had deserted her. She had been a servant in the Karesia household and, after Elaine married Dascome, Meta Thail became Elaine's personal maid. It was she who had so positively identified the poor body which had been dragged from the lake; she had a more intimate knowledge of Elaine Dascome than any one else; she had served her for so many years.

The substance of her testimony for the prosecution was that, though often enraged at Dascome, Mrs. Dascome was in deadly fear of him; that her determined clinging to Clarice was caused mostly by her fear of him; that Mrs. Dascome was haunted by fear and that it made her act wildly at times. She declared that Mrs. Dascome's decision to leave Dascome was caused by her fear that Mr. Proctor would not live long and after his death she would be at Dascome's mercy.

Meta Thail said that she herself was terrified when she returned to Mrs. Dascome's rooms at the hotel on April the fifth and found Dascome there, for Mrs. Dascome looked so white and submissive and entirely unlike herself. She said that Dascome had looked hard and determined, and had said merely: "My wife will not need your services any more, Mrs. Thail. Kindly take your things and go." Mrs. Dascome sat by without looking at her, just looking down, and when she said to her, "Good-by, Mrs. Dascome," Mrs. Dascome said something indistinct, just muttered something.

Meta Thail gave almost word for word what Dascome had said in his outbreak, the evening Mrs. Dascome left his house. The frail little woman shrank and shivered as she repeated the words. She said that Mrs. Dascome said to her and to Clarice as they were leaving the house: "You know now it's true what I've said, that he'd kill me, if he got the chance. He'll do something to me yet and get Clarice away. I must get money from father right away." Then Mrs. Dascome sent the telegram to Amos Proctor telling him: "Clarice and I have left John forever. Send me money at once. I haven't a cent." Mrs. Dascome was terribly excited and worried and said again and again: "If John gets hold of me, it will be the end. I have made my last fight."

Meta Thail declared that Mrs. Dascome was perfectly responsible, only desperately worried all the time and angry because Mr. Proctor sided with Mr. Dascome. That Mrs. Dascome blamed Mr. Dascome for the way her father treated her, not believing anything she said and always believing Dascome.

The defense drew from Meta Thail that Mrs. Dascome lived a most secluded life, never making calls or receiving callers. She admitted knowing that Mrs. Dascome received a monthly allowance of five hundred dollars from Mr. Proctor which was entirely her own, for Mr. Dascome paid all the household expenses. Meta Thail said that Mrs. Dascome was very economical and saved almost all of her allowance, that "she put it in bank." What bank? Meta Thail did not know. Mrs. Dascome had only told her that she was saving every cent she could.

Pressed by the defense, Meta Thail said that she had never thought of it before, but she could not remember having seen bank-books or check-books in Mrs. Dascome's possession, and, when further examined by the defense, she could not give a single instance of a bill being paid by check. She said it was true that Mrs. Dascome worried about money all the time, that she wanted her father to give her a sum of money, but that he wouldn't do it. She could not explain why Mrs. Dascome had telegraphed her father that "she hadn't a cent." Mrs. Dascome seemed to want to lay by every penny that she could, that was all that she knew about it. She had never known of any one's demanding sums of money from Mrs. Dascome; Mrs. Dascome had no enemies that she knew of; if she had Mrs. Dascome never mentioned it to her. That was all the defense could get from Meta Thail.

The prosecution produced Clarice. The child was twelve years old and remarkably beautiful, auburn-haired, with dark-lashed gray eyes, and extremely regular features. Dressed in black and seated beside Mrs. Ormsby, she had studied the courtroom defiantly. So far as the closest observers could discover, the eyes of father and daughter never met. Dascome maintained the expressionless calm that had never varied since the time of his arrest. Only the judge and the attorneys realized how intently watchful and alert the man was.

CLARICE went to the stand with a resolute air. She recited clearly and with a certain dramatic imitation of her father's manner, his outburst before her mother took her from his house. She was asked whether her father's manner was terrifying.

Her answer was swift, "How do I know what his manner was?"

Asked to relate what her mother had said to her and to Meta Thail after her father had made that speech, she retorted: "There's no use your asking *me* about anything mama said. She said so many things that time and every other time she got upset that I didn't bother to listen. When father talked, I listened. Father didn't talk very often."

Her questioner was anxious to have her say that her mother was afraid of her father and tried to lead her up to the statement. She fixed on him an unwavering gaze that proclaimed her Dascome's daughter. "Why don't you ask a question right out?" she inquired with a touch of contempt.

A ripple of amusement ran over the courtroom, and the lawyer put his question more directly; he did not seem at ease.

"I don't know who she was afraid of," she returned coolly. "I never did find out."

She was asked to tell about Dascome's coming to the hotel.

"Well," she said rapidly, "some one knocked and I said, 'Come in,' though mama told me not to. I wanted to see who it was. It was father. He came right in and said, 'Elaine, I want to speak to you about something—come into the other room.' He looked as if he meant it, and mama went right in. Then he talked low for a good while. I couldn't hear him, but I heard mama say, 'Yes—yes, I will.' I'd——"

The attorney interrupted. "As if she was very much frightened? 'Yes, yes, I will!' That way?"

"She said it the way *I* said it!"

"Go on, please."

"Well, I'd never heard mama say 'Yes' to anything father ever said to her, ever before, and I guessed maybe the reformatory would be coming to me next, so I got on my things and some money and went down and got a taxi outside and told the man Aunt Aimée's address. I scared her up—I made her keep me all right."

A GOOD lawyer should be a good poker player; the ability to guard his expression is one of his assets. But something in her questioner's expression, correct though it appeared to be to all others, struck fire from the witness. The jury was given a further insight into the character of John and Elaine Dascome's daughter. She sprang to her feet, aflame and finger pointing:

"I've told the truth! How dare you look at me like that? What I said to Aunt Aimée is none of your business! It was none of her business telling what I said—I wasn't going to any reformatory, that's all! You thought I'd swear to all that, didn't you? Well, I swore to tell the truth and I've told it!" She whirled on the judge: "I'm going—your Honor!" she said, and descending from the witness-stand made for the courtroom door. A court attendant tried to stop her and, as a result, had his hand deeply and silently and painfully bitten. The prosecutor said hastily that they had no further questions to ask the witness, and then Mrs. Ormsby, agonizingly crimson, reached her niece. The two left the courtroom together.

Dascome had said something to his attorneys, and, throughout, they had made no objections, had not stirred. When the scene was over, the judge said a few words that stung the ears of the prosecution. It was evident that the whole procedure had told against the prosecution, and that any move on the part of the defense would mar the effect produced on the jury; the glances cast on the defendant were unmistakably sympathetic. Dascome's was probably the most expressionless face in the room.

The prosecution produced much testimony to support their claim that Dascome had a double motive in ridding himself of his wife. They established that Dascome had great influence with Amos Proctor; that Amos Proctor consulted with Dascome about almost everything and never made a business venture without taking Dascome's advice and that Amos Proctor had backed Dascome in ventures in Wall Street which had made money for Dascome. They sought to show that Dascome knew the provisions of Mr. Proctor's will.

They established that, on the morning of April the fifth, an hour after Amos Proctor in Proctorville had been stricken by a heart attack, Dascome had received a long-distance telephone call from Proctorville, and that he had then gone at once to see his wife at the hotel. Also that at one o'clock on the afternoon of April the sixth, at Crisomby Lakes, Dascome had received another long-distance call, and that, immediately afterward, he had taken his wife out on the lake, saying at the time that he wanted to take the afternoon train to Proctorville. That, an hour and a quarter later, when he returned to the house alone, there was a telegram waiting there for him. They established that this telegram was sent from Proctorville, on April the sixth, at eleven A.M., and read:

> Amos Proctor dying. Will inform you.
> HERBERT COLT.

The prosecution produced the chief of the Briand Detective Agency who deposed that "Herbert Colt" was the name of a private detective who was frequently employed by Dascome; that this man, Colt, had been seen in Proctorville on the morning of April the fifth, and that it was he who had telephoned to Dascome that morning, an hour after Mr. Proctor had suffered a heart attack. They proved also that this same Colt had sent the long-distance message to Dascome at one o'clock on April the sixth. They had discovered, moreover, that Herbert Colt had been in and about Proctorville until April the tenth; then he had disappeared and their agency had been unable to locate him. Though the telegram signed "Herbert Colt" had been brought to the Proctorville office by a boy whom they had been unable to locate, the prosecution took it for granted that, of course, it had been sent by Colt and if he had sent the telegram at eleven o'clock when Mr. Proctor was known to be dying, then at one o'clock his long-distance telephone message must have apprised Dascome of Mr. Proctor's death.

WHEN first told of the disappearance of his wife and questioned regarding it, Dascome had made a brief statement. In the examinations to which he was subjected later, his questioners had elicited little more from him: he was versed in the law and capable of deciding whether silence or speech would be to his advantage. Thereafter, until the prosecution had presented its case, Dascome had maintained his silence.

The cross-examination of witnesses had given a clue to the line the defense meant to take: an effort to show that some other agent than the defendant had committed the murder; and that the defendant had been neither cognizant of the provisions of Amos Proctor's will nor aware of his illness and death.

Dascome's testimony was lengthy and very complete; he was as skilful in framing his answers as his counsel was in putting his questions. Dascome deposed, in substance, that for several years it had been his conviction that his wife was irresponsible at times; that such had been the belief of Amos Proctor. In support of the latter statement, the defense introduced several letters which Dascome had received from Amos Proctor in which were the following expressions:

> I think, John, that the only explanation for Elaine's conduct is that she is irresponsible. I fear, as you do, that it may continue to grow on her. It is a sad thought to a father who remembers her as one of the sweetest and most biddable of children. She was so, John—a good child. But, as she grew older, such a change! She is like that old sweet self still, at times. You do right to be patient, my boy—there may be a change for the better.

In another letter:

> I realize what Elaine is doing to Clarice, fostering in the child the same erratic, lawless spirit as her own. I do not wonder that your patience is almost exhausted. I have considered the whole situation, and it may be necessary for us to place Elaine in a sanitarium; but such a step would be a horror to me. And it would have a terrible effect upon Clarice, besides being forever a stigma on the child. Elaine is not dangerous. All we could adduce is her trying temper and this fixed idea that you want to take Clarice away from her. If we separate her from her child, I am afraid that she will go violently insane.

Another letter:

> Since talking with Dr. Semple, I know that I have only a short time to live. I shall have to leave the problem of Elaine to you, John. I have every confidence in you. My advice is to endure as long as you can, try in every way to keep Elaine to the normal. If it proves an impossibility, then do what you think is the wisest for Elaine, for Clarice, and for yourself. Of this I am convinced, Clarice will turn to you in time, for the child has a firmer character and more intelligence than poor Elaine ever had. I realize that I am making you a sad bequest. I thank you for your long forbearance.

Dascome deposed that all that had been said about his wife's violent temper was true. He declared that never, on any occasion, had he threatened to take Clarice away from her mother, also that never, in all his experience with his wife, had she said to him, or had she shown by her manner to him, that she feared bodily harm from him. He denied most emphatically Mrs. Ormsby's and Meta Thail's statements to the contrary. He said that the only time he had spoken threateningly to his wife was the occasion when she left his house, and that then he had spoken with all the sternness at his command, hoping to restrain her from taking a step which would be a terrible shock to her father.

Dascome said that after a night of consideration he had decided to follow an entirely different course and see whether it would remove from his wife's mind the fixed idea which seemed the cause of her unaccountable conduct; that he went then direct to his wife's apartment at the hotel so as to secure an interview. Then he had told her that he had decided to give up all claim on Clarice and, if she so willed, that he would not see Clarice until the child was of age; that he would leave her free to take Clarice and live wherever she chose. In return, he asked her to arrange her life for a time in a way that would not distress her father; she knew her father could not live long. To this his wife had agreed.

DASCOME stated that his wife had listened thoughtfully to what he had said. He had asked her whether she had sent any message to her father, and she told him that she had not done so; otherwise he would have communicated with Mr. Proctor at once. He said that his complete relinquishment of Clarice seemed to have a curious effect on his wife: that she seemed indifferent about the matter over which she had contended so long, that she seemed without incentive; that when Mrs. Ormsby telephoned that Clarice had fled to her, his wife had shown no excitement and had answered Mrs. Ormsby briefly and indifferently. Dascome said that his wife had spoken of taking Clarice with her to Crisomby Lakes, but, to his surprise, when Mrs. Ormsby said that Clarice was with her, Mrs. Dascome had asked Mrs. Ormsby to keep Clarice for a while. Also that he was surprised when his wife said that she did not want to keep Meta Thail any longer, and asked him to discharge the woman and tell her to go at once.

Dascome stated that he had complied with this wish as he had with every wish his wife had expressed. She wanted to go to Crisomby at once and asked him to make the arrangements and take her there. Their understanding was that he would leave her at Crisomby, then go on to Proctorville, as he had an appointment with Herbert Colt in Proctorville on the seventh. His wife had agreed that it would be best for him to see Mr. Proctor then and explain matters to him in a way that would not shock him.

Dascome said that from the moment he had told his wife that he gave up all claim to Clarice, she was listless and apparently indifferent; that her manner was curious, that she was not like her usual self. He said that, after their arrival, he did not see her until lunch time on April the sixth, and then she asked him to take her out on the lake, and it was understood that he must return in time to catch the afternoon train to Proctorville. He said that his wife asked him to row to the lower end of the lake and, as she seemed preoccupied, they rowed for the most part in silence; that he asked no questions and made no comments, for he was determined that she should feel that he relinquished every claim; that she must decide her own future.

Dascome said he was on the lake for exactly fifty minutes; he had watched the time because of the train he must catch. Then his wife said that she wanted to row about by herself for a time, so he brought the boat alongside the lake bank at the upper end of the inlet called the Dragon's Pool. He meant to step from the boat to the bank, but the boat backed away and he landed in the water and sank well above his head. He said that it was merely an annoying incident and that neither he nor his wife was alarmed; that his hat had floated off and that seemed to amuse his wife. Dascome said he spent a little time wringing the water from his coat and then walked back to his house; that he saw his wife take up the oars and row toward the end of the lake where the driftwood collected.

Dascome was asked by his counsel whether, on the morning of April the fifth, he had received a long-distance telephone message, and, if so, what was its nature.

He answered that he was called to the telephone just as he was starting to go to the hotel to see his wife. The message was from Herbert Colt, a detective he had sent to Proctorville to find Bain Atwell, the man who had threatened him, and whom he had thrashed during the Devereux trial. He said he had kept a watch on the man's movements for some time, and on the third of April Herbert Colt had heard that Atwell had been seen in Proctorville, and he had sent Colt to discover whether the report was true. Colt told him on the morning of April the fifth that Atwell was at a resort near Proctorville, the Fox House, and he told Colt to keep watch on Atwell and that he, Dascome, would come to Proctorville on the seventh and have a talk with him. They arranged over the telephone that when he arrived in Proctorville on the seventh he should see Colt at the Cates House, where Colt was staying. Dascome said that Amos Proctor's name was not mentioned; that their conversation was about Atwell only.

Dascome said that the message he had received at one o'clock the next day, April the sixth, was also from Herbert Colt, from Proctorville, and reported his inability to find Atwell. "I told him," said Dascome, "'Wait for me in Proctorville. I'm taking the afternoon train from here and I'll come to the Cates House and see you as soon as I get in to-morrow morning. Meanwhile sift Proctorville for Atwell, for I don't want a bullet in my back.'" That was their conversation in its entirety.

REGARDING the telegram signed "Herbert Colt," which he had received on his return from the lake, Dascome said that the moment he saw it he had known it was not from Colt, for, had it been, Colt would have told him of it when he had telephoned; the telegram had been sent at eleven o'clock that morning and he had talked with Colt at one o'clock; besides, that Colt always signed his messages "Bert." Dascome said that he had instantly suspected that Atwell had sent him the telegram, most likely as a ruse to get him to Proctorville, and he was the more anxious to go to Proctorville and run the man down.

Dascome said that before his arrival in Proctorville, he had had no knowledge whatever of Amos Proctor's illness, except the statement in the telegram, which he had considered false. He had not called up the Proctor house to inquire whether or not Mr. Proctor was ill, because five minutes at the telephone would have lost him his train and there was no other train until the next day. His object had been to get to Proctorville as soon as possible. But when he reached Proctorville he changed his plan to go to the Cates House to see Herbert Colt, because at the station he was told of Mr. Proctor's death, and went straight to the Proctor house.

Dascome insisted that he knew nothing whatever about the provisions of Amos Proctor's will until after the will was read; that never, at any time, had Amos Proctor mentioned his will to him, or discussed with him what disposal he meant to make of his property.

The defense called the lawyer who had drawn Amos Proctor's will and he testified, that, so far as he knew, John Dascome had not been an advisory. The will was drawn in his office, and Mr. Proctor had said that he wished its contents to be kept secret from his family. The document was placed in the care of the —— Trust Company of New York, the executor under its terms.

The defense established that exhaustive investigations had failed to show that Elaine Dascome had ever, since her marriage to Dascome, had a bank account, that she had ever given a check in payment of a bill, that she had ever made an investment, or that she had ever had a safety deposit box; that, in spite of the five-hundred-a-month allowance from her father, apparently she was penniless at the time of her death. The defense then produced the chambermaid the Dascomes had taken with them when they went to Crisomby Lakes, and this girl testified that she was in Mrs. Dascome's room at one o'clock when Mrs. Dascome came upstairs to put on her wraps before going out on the lake with Mr. Dascome, and that she saw Mrs. Dascome place about her neck the chain to which the leather pouch was attached.

Then Mrs. Dascome stuffed into the pouch a roll of bills and pushed the pouch down beneath her dress; the pouch was so full that "it made her dress stick out in front." Mrs. Dascome took from a drawer a packet of what looked like letters and hid them under the thick knitted cape which she held wrapped about her. All this the maid saw in the mirror from where she was standing in the bathroom. She had then watched Mrs. Dascome go down to the rowboat where Mr. Dascome was waiting for her, and she had noticed that Mrs. Dascome was holding her cape about her in the same way as when she left the room. The maid identified the water-stained leather pouch and the gold chain which were found on Mrs. Dascome's body. Meta Thail had also identified the chain; the pouch she could not remember ever having seen.

The last witness the defense produced was Herbert Colt. He was thirty years old, was a powerfully built man, tall and muscular, and noticeable because of an unusually long rough-featured face and small eyes. He had been a strike-breaker during the great Proctorville strike; later he had gone to New York and had set up as a private detective and—through Dascome's recommendation—had worked for various lawyers and private individuals.

HERBERT COLT substantiated Dascome's testimony regarding Bain Atwell and Dascome's sending him to Proctorville to locate the man. Colt's version of their conversations over long-distance tallied with Dascome's account; nothing had been said about Mr. Proctor. Colt deposed that he had known nothing about Mr. Proctor's illness and death until he saw the evening papers, several hours after he had sent his last telephone message to Dascome. He swore that he had not sent the telegram signed "Herbert Colt"; that he did not know who had sent it; that he had known nothing about it until he had left Proctorville and had come to New York, when Dascome's counsel had questioned him about it.

Colt declared that he had not been in hiding or sequestered in any way, that he had simply been searching the country for Atwell; that he had been in California, Canada, and Mexico.

The prosecution asked, "You were employed by the defense, then?"

"I was not," Colt answered curtly. "I was on my own. I guessed Atwell knew something about that affair at Crisomby Lakes. 'Twould have been a feather in my cap, if I could have produced him. I was convinced Dascome never murdered his wife."

The prosecution then called several witnesses in rebuttal: a night watchman for the Cullum Street district, which is the mill tenement district of Proctorville; a man named Ephraim Norkoff whose small tailor shop backed on the alley which ran between his shop and the Cates House, where Herbert Colt stayed when in Proctorville; and the butler from the Proctor house.

The night watchman deposed that he knew John Dascome well by sight; that at midnight, on April the seventh, Dascome passed him on Cullum Street, near the Cates House; that he saw Dascome go into the Cates House alley. He had not followed him.

The tailor, Norkoff, said that at midnight on April the seventh, he had just turned out the light in his back room and was about to draw down the shade, when he saw a man lift the window of one of the rooms in the Cates House, then climb in. Then the window was lowered and the shade drawn. He went out into the alley and, though he could not see beneath the shade, there was a tear in the shade through which he could see very well. He said that questionable characters put up at the Cates House, so he had no compunction in spying. He stated that he knew Herbert Colt very well by sight, also that he knew John Dascome, Amos Proctor's son-in-law. He said that Colt and Dascome sat close together and that Dascome was talking earnestly and very low, and Colt talking occasionally. Then Dascome gave a roll of bills to Colt.

Norkoff said that he had thought it none of his business and he had said nothing about it until he heard about the murder; then he had told a neighbor and it had spread in the neighborhood. Norkoff was a small man, bow-legged, pale and thin; his large eager eyes and pallor made him pathetic. His parents had been mill-hands, he was a child of the mills, their stamp was on him, face and body.

The Proctor house butler deposed that Mr. Dascome had gone out at about eleven o'clock on the night of April the seventh, shortly after the word had come about Elaine Dascome's disappearance, and that Dascome had not returned to the Proctor house until just before morning.

Both Dascome and Colt had sworn that they had not seen each other since the morning of April the third, when Dascome had sent Colt to Proctorville. The tailor, Norkoff, swore that he saw them in secret conference on the night of the seventh. It rested with the jury to decide which had told the truth.

THE prosecution argued that Dascome was fully acquainted with the provisions of Amos Proctor's will before he took his wife to Crisomby Lakes and killed her; also that he knew of Amos Proctor's illness and death; that he was in a frame of mind to be rid of her at any cost. That Herbert Colt had acted as Dascome's spy and informer in Proctorville, and that as soon as Dascome knew that Amos Proctor had had a heart attack which would, in all probability, prove fatal, he had gone to his wife, who was in terror of him and had forced her to go to Crisomby with him, and there had waited for further information.

They asserted that as soon as Dascome learned from Herbert Colt that Amos Proctor was dead, he took his wife out on the lake, and there attacked her; that her half-smothered scream, which was answered by Jimmy Calhoun, had caused him to complete his work in frantic haste. That he had flung his wife into the lake and he himself had plunged into the water and, to escape observation, swum under water to the shelter of the willows where he hid until Jimmy Calhoun had gone, when he swam to an easier landing place and hurried to his house with the tale of a fall into the lake.

The prosecution said the unexpected presence of Jimmy Calhoun had entirely upset Dascome's plans; that, in consequence, he had been unable to make the disappearance of his wife appear as either an accident or a suicide, and he had been forced to face the damning evidence against him. That his next hurried move had been to hasten to Proctorville and confer with Herbert Colt. The prosecution did not claim that Colt was accessory to the murder, but maintained that certainly there was a secret understanding between the two men and that Dascome had paid money to Herbert Colt. The prosecution said the mention of Bain Atwell, whom the defense had not produced, was designed only to create an impression that some other agent than Dascome might have committed the murder.

The prosecution said it had fully established that Dascome had spent an hour on the lake, and that Jimmy Calhoun had spent not more than thirty-five minutes of that time working over his traps; that even if the boy had spent three-quarters of an hour over his traps, Dascome was, according to his own showing, on the lake at that time. They argued that no jury of sensible, clear-minded men could do otherwise than find the defendant guilty. The prosecution characterized the defendant as scheming and shrewd as well as revengeful and brutal. He had shown subtlety in committing the crime so immediately after being secretly informed of Mr. Proctor's death, for should the crime be laid at his door and he be accused of mercenary motives, he could declare that, under the circumstances, no man hoping to profit by his father-in-law's will would murder his wife before the death of the father-in-law.

THE defense argued at great length on the subject of memory; they argued that no one could determine how long the boy, Jimmy Calhoun, had spent in the underbrush contiguous to Upper Crisomby; that memory, particularly as to time, was utterly unreliable, and that without doubt the lad had spent time in an act or acts that he had totally forgotten; that the prosecution was assuming that memory is infallible, when it is universally accepted that memory is subject to lapses, is governed often by delusions—an utterly undependable faculty.

The defense argued that they had fully established that for many years Elaine Dascome had shown symptoms of abnormality; that she had lived an unnatural life; that both her husband and her father had considered her irresponsible. They argued that a woman in Elaine Dascome's state of mind would be an easy prey to the unscrupulous. It had been shown that she had received a large allowance, yet she was in continual anxiety over money; though for years she had practised the utmost economy, at her death she was penniless. The defense insisted that her anxiety over money indicated that she had been systematically robbed or blackmailed, her allowance extorted from her.

The defense regarded the testimony of the chamber-maid as vitally important: Mrs. Dascome had taken, concealed on her person, a sum of money and a packet of letters; very evidently a thing to be concealed from her husband; when her body was discovered the leather pouch was empty and no trace of the letters was found. The defense insisted that Elaine Dascome had gone on the lake expecting to meet some one at the spot called "The Dragon's Pool." She had asked her husband to row her in that direction and when he left her she had met this person. It was reasonable to suppose that a quarrel had ensued in which she had been attacked, then that, startled by Jimmy Calhoun's shout, both she and her attacker had lost their balance and had fallen into the lake. In the hour and a half before the sheriff brought his posse to the lake, the attacker had had an abundance of time in which to make his escape.

The defense characterized the instigator of the murder charge as little better than a blackmailer; said the prosecution had not produced evidence to support her charge, which had been made with the hope of discrediting the defendant to such an extent that there might be a basis for contesting the will in which he was named as a beneficiary. They argued that no jury of reasonable and fair-minded men would convict a fellow man on the merely conjectural evidence which the prosecution had had the audacity to present to them.

Judge Whitsey's charge to the jury was brief and marked by strict impartiality.

The prosecution expressed itself as confident of a conviction; the attorneys for the defense declared themselves as confident of an acquittal; John Dascome refused to make any comment.

A well-known author who, throughout the trial, had supplied one of the great dailies with her reflections on John Dascome, closed her series of articles with the paragraph: "It has been said truly, 'Behind every tragedy is a woman.' Who is the 'woman' in this strange case? Is she one of the many who have haunted this trial? Or does she keep herself secluded, waiting? To all others this man is inscrutable; he wears a steel mask, his eyes are blue steel. But somewhere there is a woman to whom he is no mystery; to whom he is simply *a man.*"

AFTER forty-eight hours of seclusion, the jury in the Dascome case agreed upon disagreement; three members of the jury could not be argued or persuaded out of their conviction that John Dascome had murdered his wife. He was promptly brought to trial again, and, this time, acted as his own counsel.

Throughout the first trial, the courtroom had been crowded; during the second trial there was barely breathing space. Sensation seekers a-plenty were there, but the thoughtful and the critical were in the majority: a society element, lawyers who came to see John Dascome conduct his case, playwrights, authors, actors.

It was evident at the outset that, in the first trial, the prosecution had presented all the evidence at its command. What Dascome did to and with that evidence was the interesting thing. The prosecution had exploited the character of Elaine Dascome. He took these witnesses and led them to say more and go farther and put more feeling into what they said. He made every man live with him through years of torturing harassment, grow desperate, together with him. He made women weep out of sheer pity for him and flush with pain and anger over the utterly unreasonable conduct of a woman.

He made them see Amos Proctor, keen financier that he was, bowed down with distress over his daughter, fearful of placing an immense sum in her hands with which to work her erratic will; trying to do the wisest thing. He made them see two men, father and husband, both striving for the welfare of an unfortunate being whom neither of them could understand and whom both of them pitied, even more than they pitied one another.

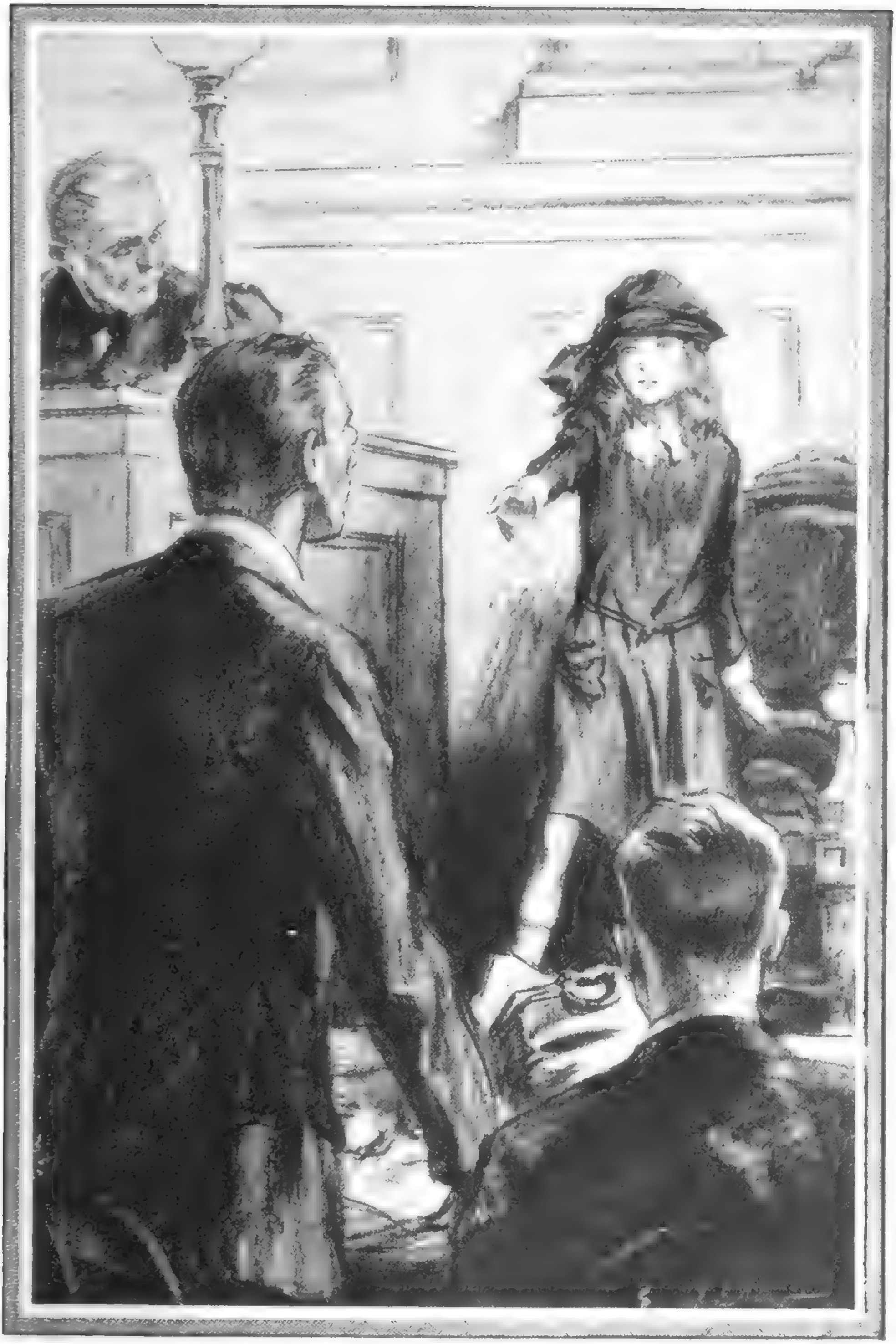
Then, when Dascome had captured the sympathy, not only of the jury, but of every disinterested onlooker, he sprang his surprise: he placed on the stand, first a woman who had been one of Clarice's teachers, then Meta Thail, then Mrs. Ormsby.

Mrs. Doane was instructor in a well-known private school for girls and was highly respected, a handsome dark-eyed woman of about Dascome's own age, thirty-six. She testified that one day when she went to give Clarice her usual lesson, she found Mrs. Dascome in a very excited state. Meta Thail was trying to quiet Mrs. Dascome and Mrs. Dascome said to Meta: "I tell you they are hounding me to death! Ever since those days in Proctorville, they have wrung me dry, *dry!*" Then Mrs. Dascome had wrung her hands and wept aloud.

Then Dascome questioned Meta Thail. The woman seemed more bent and shrinking; her sad eyes looked vague and her cheeks were thinner and blanched; under Dascome's unwavering gaze she shrank to almost nothing. Though cowering, she fought well, however: she could not remember the occurrence to which Mrs. Doane had testified. She admitted finally that Mrs. Dascome frequently used the word "hounded."

Asked by the prosecution, she said that she had always thought that Mrs. Dascome meant Mr. Dascome and Mr. Proctor when she used to say that she was "hounded."

Then, inch by inch, fighting both the prosecution and Meta Thail's reluctance every inch of the way, Dascome drew from Meta Thail certain occurrences during the eighteen months of Elaine Dascome's interest in radicalism. She admitted that the wild quarrels during Elaine's marriage to Alexander Karesia resulted from the dangerous people with whom Elaine insisted on allying herself; that Karesia had been a highly educated and talented man and a conservative socialist; that he warned



Clarice sprang to her feet, aflame. "I've told the truth! How dare you look at me like that? What I said to Aunt Aimee is none of your business!"

Elaine constantly that the greatest curse inflicted upon socialism was the criminals who used socialism as a cloak for criminality. That Elaine brought to his house men whom Alexander Karesia abhorred; that he told Elaine that these men were bad, criminals—that all they wanted was her money; that Elaine did give them money; that she attended secret meetings that debated a war of the Reds, the overthrow of the government, and that, when she became too deeply involved, she fled to her father.

Dascome extracted from Meta Thail, finally, that it might have been some associates of Elaine's lawless days who had "hounded" her through subsequent years, and that Elaine had explained her constant fear and anxiety by pretending that it was Dascome of whom she was in terror. Trembling and shrinking under Dascome's merciless probing, Meta Thail said that Mrs. Dascome received letters which she either hid away or destroyed quickly and that sometimes Mrs. Dascome would have "wild attacks," after getting these letters.

But Meta Thail clung to her ignorance: she had never seen what was in any letter or from whom they came and Mrs. Dascome had never told her anything about them. She did not know what Mrs. Dascome did with her money; Mrs. Dascome had always said that she was saving it. Meta Thail shuddered when she said that she had never known any of the men Elaine had brought to Alexander Karesia's house; she, Meta, was in the kitchen, she did not know their names or their faces, only that they did come; that other people in Proctorville knew that they did come and that Elaine gave them money.

It was like chasing a cringing, terrified dog around an endless circle. Whether or not she knew something she was afraid to tell, Dascome placed her in that light to the jury. When Meta Thail was allowed to depart, she crept away looking limp and sick and vague.

Mrs. Ormsby succeeded her. She eyed Dascome as resolutely and as steadfastly as he eyed her, her color high. With startling abruptness, Dascome asked her whether she remembered a certain accident to her sister Elaine when they were twelve years old, a severe fall from a swing? There was a perceptible pause before Mrs. Ormsby said, "No, I don't remember any particular fall Elaine had."

"Do you remember any occasion when your nurse was with you and your sister fell out of a swing and was unconscious for some time?"

Mrs. Ormsby's color faded. "Yes—I do remember now. It was so long ago I don't remember much about it, though." She had grown quite white, but she held her head high.

DASCOME was rightly credited with being terrible on occasion. There was a granite solidity about the man, combined with the dangerous keenness of a rapier, granite-gray and blue steel in his steadfast eyes. Bit by bit, skilfully keeping the possible testimony of the nurse as a sword hung above her head, Dascome forced from Aimée Ormsby the history of a children's quarrel: how Elaine had claimed the swing, and she (Dascome forced her to say that she was the taller and the stronger twin) had thrust Elaine out of it and Elaine had fallen, striking her head against a stone, and becoming unconscious. She and the nurse had been terrified; they had not cared to call a doctor; the nurse had brought Elaine to.

Mr. Proctor was away at the time and she, Aimée, had begged the nurse not to tell Mr. Proctor about the accident. After the accident Elaine had acted queerly, seeming to be dazed. Elaine recovered after a few days, but she took a violent dislike to the nurse and quarreled constantly with Aimée and insisted upon having her own way about everything, although she had always been so gentle. Mr. Proctor sent the nurse away and when she went she said to Aimée, "I won't tell your father on you, but Elaine's never gotten over that fall you gave her."

"Did you ever tell your father of this accident to your sister?" Dascome asked, when he had dragged it all from her.

"No."

"In all these years did it ever occur to you that there might be a reason for your poor sister's erratic conduct which so puzzled her husband and her father? That you held in your hand the explanation?"

"No, it did not!" she flashed at him desperately. "That happened years ago!"

"I have no further questions to ask of you, Mrs. Ormsby," he said, with immeasurable contempt.

In its final argument, the prosecution followed the same line as in the first trial; the testimony of Jimmy Calhoun was its strong point. Dascome brushed aside the argument on this point with a single sentence: "A boy can spend an hour hunting a bird's nest and forget that he did it, or spend an hour and a half whittling figure-fours and not dream of it afterwards."

Dascome's handling of his case was pronounced by his own profession one of the cleverest bits of legal strategy they had ever known, and his pleading a masterpiece; women wept and men sighed and moved restlessly. His appeal was to the emotions, to the sympathy human beings, if not too deeply prejudiced, never withhold from the blackest criminal, still less from a man deserving the benefit of the doubt and pleading his own cause. No one in that courtroom was allowed to forget that he had striven to vindicate his wife, the little girl injured and unconscious of her injury, a flower broken while in bud and never reaching perfect bloom; a poor fevered brain, fit victim of the unscrupulous; a mystery to those who could not understand and in their ignorance blundered, but with pity always beneath their efforts to solve the mystery.

It was late afternoon when the jury retired, but that crowded and jammed roomful of people waited breathlessly. It was said afterward that not a single person left the room during that time of waiting.

THE jury was absent from the courtroom for barely twenty minutes; the verdict was, "Not guilty."

There followed then the scuffle and stir of a tensely rapt audience released. In the foreground, there was the mingling of groups that during the trial were formally detached; the prosecuting attorney was talking to the lawyers for the defense, and Mrs. Ormsby stood surrounded by her friends.

She had regained her poise, but she was very pale. "He won his case because he is clever, not because he is innocent," she said in a tight-lipped way to those who condoled with her. "Time will show."

Dascome stood alone for only a few moments; then men and women had extricated themselves from the tangled crowd in the room and reached him. Reporters reached him first. "Mr. Dascome?"

Dascome raised his hand. "Nothing! *Nothing!*"

It was a woman who wormed her way beneath men's elbows and caught his hand. Her hat was awry, her eyes strained, one of those beings who haunt all sensational trials. "It was splendid! I've been here ever since it began——"

Dascome extricated his hand. "I have noticed your faithful attendance, madam. It reminded me of the waiting vulture." His voice was gritty.

As he turned, he encountered a young girl; he looked down into wide admiring eyes. "I knew you were innocent!" she said tearfully. "I just had to tell you so!"

Dascome looked at her gravely; his years of court experience made him a good judge. "Thank you," he said. "Go home now and don't do it again."

The other women tired of the sensation and melted away and the men closed in, most of them business acquaintances, several of them former golf and athletic-club friends. Dascome shook hands with all alike, the genuinely sympathetic and the curious.

He was questioned about the future. What were his plans? It was what the reporters wanted to know.

"I have no plans to make public. Thank you—all of you—for your kindness and interest."

It was all that could be drawn from him. He looked at the courtroom door, still jammed by the exuding crowd. He looked coolly and observantly at the group of which Mrs. Ormsby was the center. Even while his hand was being shaken by some congratulator, he noted the various groups and individuals in the room. He looked longest and most frequently at a woman and man who stood apart from others, near the center isle. The man stood negligently, as if waiting the woman's pleasure, but she never moved her eyes from Dascome.

Some odd-looking people had haunted this trial; a tall, round-shouldered and spectacled man with side whiskers which gave width to his long face, and a frock coat which gave him a ministerial air, had insinuated himself into the group about Dascome until he stood just behind him. He touched him and Dascome turned his head and their eyes met, an exchanged glance; then the man moved away. In a few moments, the crowd had no center; Dascome had edged out and was on his way to the door. He passed rapidly those who were waiting for a closer inspection of him; there were women who smiled and bowed to him who were fully as fashionable in appearance as the group now moving with Mrs. Ormsby toward the door, and Dascome bowed in return, but unsmilingly.

But to the woman who had never moved her eyes from him and who smiled at him swiftly and brilliantly as he passed, her whole face alight, he bowed low and smiled his quick unexpected smile that drove all somberness from his face. She made a curious motion which the young man with her did not see, for he was looking at Dascome with intense interest; she laid her clasped hands on her breast, her brilliant eyes eloquent. Dascome saw and his eyes lighted. Then he moved on, her gaze following him.

She was older than the man who accompanied her, with topaz eyes in a dark oval face, a vivid, expressive face; she had that indescribable something about her that bespeaks the woman accustomed to the public gaze. She was richly gowned; her fur coat, which her escort carried over his arm, was worth a small fortune. And about the young man was the same atmosphere of ease before a multitude. He was an extraordinarily handsome creature, erect, slender, and tall, with vividly blue eyes and black hair. Evidently Dascome knew the woman better than did the general public, though all New York knew Nadine Navarre, the actress.

At the door, Dascome shook off the reporters who were trying to intercept him and, with a degree of force, made his way out into the corridor. He was stared at by the crowd at the door; there were those who drew away from his proximity in a noticeable manner, preferring the shoves and elbowing to which they were subjected to contact with John Dascome. Evidently there were those who were not of the same mind as the group who had offered their congratulations.

In the corridor, Dascome turned off sharply to the right, where the tall man with the side whiskers awaited him. "Well, J. D.?" this man said.

"Well, Bert?" Dascome answered.

"I'll tell you as we go along," the man returned in a voice which was more recognizable than his face.

They went down the corridor and out of sight.

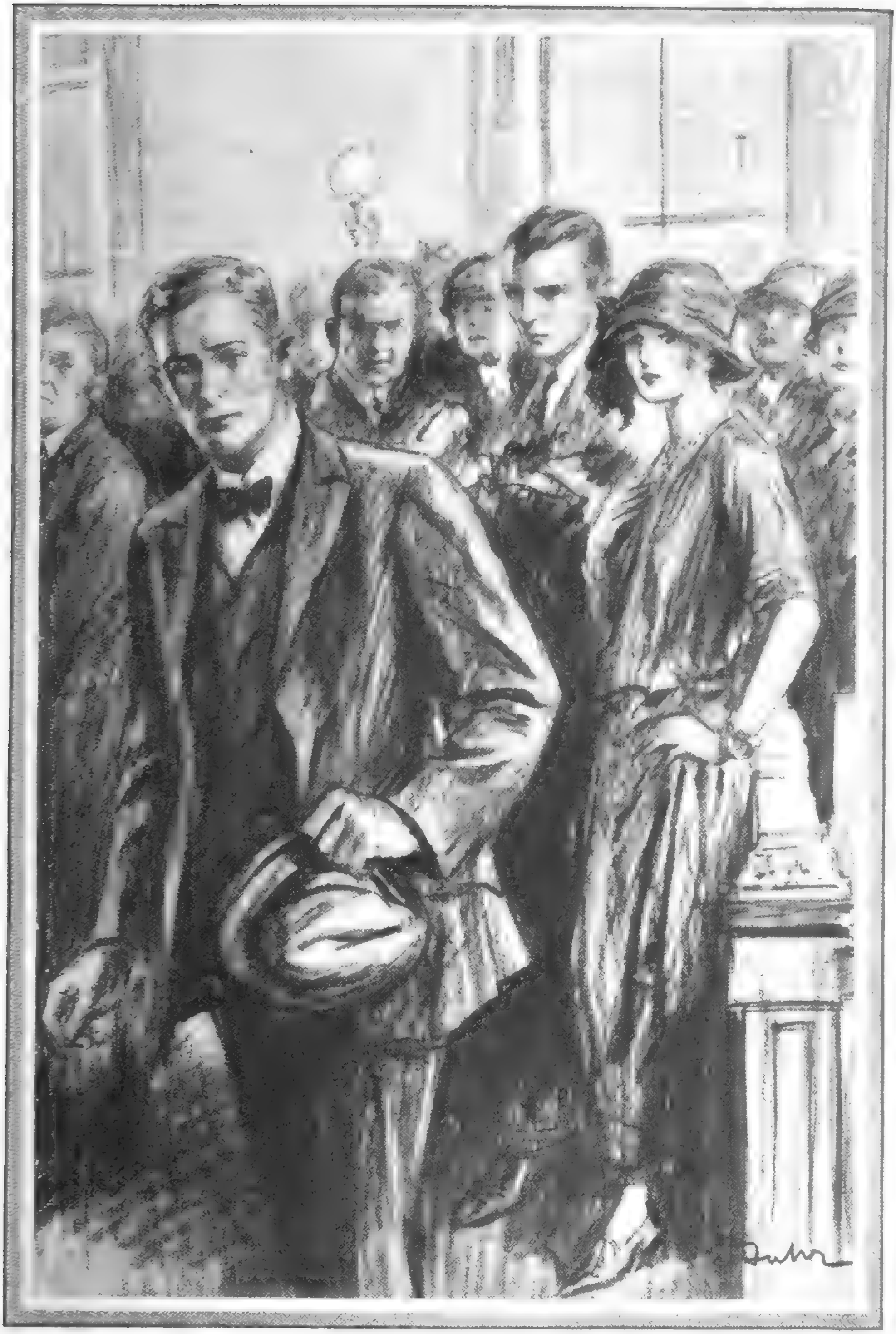
THAT same evening, in Nadine Navarre's blue and gold boudoir, in her Marie Antoinette apartment east of the park, a controversy which had enlivened a tête-à-tête dinner was still in progress.

"My dear Nadine, I have a right to my opinion," the young man who was lounging on the blue satin divan insisted. "Why, he tampered openly with that jury. He did not *say*, 'Now imagine yourselves in my place.' He put them there! Every man in that jury felt himself struggling on through life with a woman like that, and desperate for a way out. He led them to forget all about the ten millions. Then, when he had them pitying him so completely that their throats ached—I know mine did—he gave them the excuse which they grasped as one would a life-line: she had been mixed up with socialists some fifteen years before. To portly gentlemen like the members of that jury, a socialist would hound anything. I am a socialist, so are you; we know better, but not those gentlemen!

"Then, to crown it all, Mr. Dascome shows himself a true gentleman: his poor wife had suffered from childhood from pressure on the brain. He did not know it, her unhappy father did not know it, and they blundered, as well-meaning men will. Incidentally, he showed up his sister-in-law. The jury was composed of thrifty bourgeois, solid men, like my good uncle Rossiter; they did not like the look of Mr. Dascome's accuser, neither did I—Mrs. Ormsby looks the cold-blooded plutocrat.

"The bourgeois have no more love for the plutocrat than they have for the socialist. They liked Dascome—a lawyer to be sure, but a hard-working man, nevertheless, who had made his own way. I think that John Dascome murdered his wife, wilfully and deliberately, and with the intention of proving her insane and a suicide—he wanted to be rid of her and he wanted her ten millions. But Fate intervened in the form of Jimmy Calhoun. I think that John Dascome won his case on sympathy and prejudice, not on evidence; I think him a superb actor."

"It is not my belief!" Nadine Navarre returned scornfully. "I have permitted you



To the woman who had never moved her eyes from him, Dascome bowed low as he passed, and smiled his quick unexpected smile that drove all somberness from his face.

to talk—it shows to me how the public talk. In John Dascome I believe!"

The young man eyed her amusedly. "Feminine instinct, dear Nadine? Or something else?"

She had been walking about, her draperies afloat. She paused and looked at him, quivering, as if she restrained herself with difficulty. "Life has become a little too easy to you, Randsome Rossiter. Women come to you a little too easily for the asking. In a year you have become the matinée idol. John Dascome, he is a *man!*"

Rossiter sat upright. He studied her for a moment, his face suddenly grave. "So!" he said slowly. "Your smile and bow were not merely a courtroom congratulation. I might have guessed it! You've known him for some time—behold the *affaire du cœur* that the presecution could not unearth! My dear Nadine, I congratulate you!" The devil of anger was in his vivid blue eyes; spots of color showed in his cheeks.

Nadine Navarre literally flamed. "Because I have made of you what you are, you dare to insult me! John Dascome is my *friend*, know that! There is not about *him* the conceit of a pretty boy!"

Rossiter grew white with anger. He got to his feet. "If you will pardon me for saying so, Madame Navarre, it is my debt to you that has held me, not 'the conceit of a pretty boy,' petted by a great actress. I thank you for your kindness and, if it is ever in my power to repay, I shall do so." From the door he bowed to her. "If I had known that it was John Dascome you expected to-night, I would have made my adieu earlier in the evening."

"Grosse tête et peu de sens!" Nadine Navarre flung after him.

ON THAT same evening, in the library of his pleasant suburban home, Judge Joseph Whitsey stretched his slippered feet to the friendly fire. His wife was holding the lighted match to his after-dinner cigar—a little ceremony rarely neglected. Then she drew up her chair, a small low chair designed for a small woman who was in the habit of sitting—of evenings—with her arm resting on her husband's knee.

"Well?" she asked then.

"Well?" he countered, his eyes twinkling.

"Oh, you don't need to tell me that they acquitted him, Joe! I've read every extra to-day. That man *is* clever!"

"Yes, he is," the judge agreed dryly.

"I couldn't help feeling glad that Mrs. Ormsby got hers, as they say. I have had no use for that woman since she allowed them to put that child on the stand to testify against her father. Small satisfaction Mrs. Ormsby got out of that, too!"

The judge's lips took a stern line. "When we're a little more civilized, we won't do things like that. It was the biggest mistake the prosecution made." Then he smiled slightly. "Well, Dascome had his revenge."

His wife studied the fire. "I've thought a good deal about this case," she announced. "I sat beside John Dascome at the last Bar Association dinner—you remember the time?" She looked up at him. "Joe, he never murdered his wife."

"Because you sat beside him once at dinner?" her husband inquired. "Well, the jury brought in that verdict."

"I know—but what do *you* think, Joseph Whitsey?"

He moved restlessly. "You've taken this case a bit to heart, haven't you?"

"It stirs one's imagination," she said earnestly. "That unaccountable woman and her strange child and that adamant man with his fearless eyes."

The judge glanced over his shoulder, but the door was closed. "Sadie, I know John Dascome's tactics too well. You remember the Devereux case? Dexter Devereux should have hung—he would have hung, but for Dascome's clever handling of the jury. To a man, that jury was anti-socialist and Dascome played chess with their brains—the ingenuity of the very devil! He's very clever, Sadie, and *ruthless*. I think he's guilty."

"Then you think he knew what was in Mr. Proctor's will?"

"I do."

Sarah Whitsey studied the fire thoughtfully. "I think he did—too. But I do not believe that he meant to murder his wife, murder her in that stupid, brutal fashion. Never! John Dascome is much too subtle for that!" She looked up at her husband, her eyes sparkling. "Now, Joe, let me tell you what *I* think! You remember that queer provision in Mr. Proctor's will? That should Elaine Dascome become incapacitated or, for any reason, be unable to administer her own affairs, the ten million should be paid to John Dascome? Well, I believe that Dascome persuaded Mr. Proctor to make that provision; it's in keeping with my conception of John Dascome's character. I think that he took his wife out on the lake, had it all planned that, when she wandered back to her home or was discovered by searching parties, she would be adjudged incapacitated and unable to administer her affairs—she was half crazy, he meant that she should become wholly so.

"You may be sure that he had made a careful study of her case and that he knew what to do. The woman was in deadly terror of him and I think it was he who forced her to bring along that packet of letters and the money that were never found. And I don't believe that any one else had any hand in it at all, not even Herbert Colt, though Colt may have had his suspicions and have been paid to keep quiet about them. I believe that Dascome was about his work, whatever it was, when Fate intervened in the shape of Jimmy Calhoun; and what followed was either the result of panic on Dascome's part or an accident—in all likelihood both he and his wife fell into the lake."

The judge eyed his wife leniently. "Evolving plots is your profession, Sadie—you're blessed with an imagination."

"I know it, my dear. That's why we get along so beautifully; you have none—a case of opposites. But, Joe, can't you see? It doesn't stand to reason, I tell you! Only a fool would *murder* his wife under those circumstances! Why, he'd know that he would be accused first thing! A man endure year in and year out the harassment that John Dascome endured, just quietly waiting until he knew just what sort of a will his father-in-law had made, helped him to make it, then all of a sudden murder his wife in a way that was certain to bring suspicion upon himself? Ridiculous! Why, it's entirely out of keeping with the man's character and previous conduct!"

"He has a terrible temper, Sadie, and a man enraged is not accountable."

"IF JOHN DASCOME ever in his life gave himself up to his temper, it was because he judged that a show of temper would best accomplish his purpose. That man *thinks* before he *acts*. I'll grant this, Joe: the man is more than human who does not occasionally let slip what is in his mind, and I think that John Dascome let slip what was in his mind when he said to his wife, 'There have been times, Elaine, when I have been angry enough to kill you, but there are worse things in this world than simply dying.' Madness is worse than death, and that was the fate he had in store for her. On that account I am convinced that Jimmy Calhoun proved a merciful intervention."

"You haven't convinced me," the judge said judicially. "I prefer to believe that the man lost his head for the time being, as have thousands of other wife-slayers. Next thing you'll be trying to prove to me that the corpus delicti was not Elaine Dascome at all," he added with sarcasm. "Her double, placed in the lake through some 'subtle' machination of your superman Dascome, Sadie."

His wife lost her gravity. "Joe, you funny old dear! You're so matter-of-fact! You'd argue of course that, should poor Elaine's ghost suddenly appear and demand her ten millions of John Dascome, he would promptly murder the ghost. Well, he wouldn't. He'd make very sure that she couldn't prove that she was Elaine and just let her go on living—and he'd go on enjoying her ten millions. It's as I said in the beginning: we have different conceptions of his character."

The judge's eyes began to twinkle.

"In spite of all that, I'm willing to bet there's one point on which we do agree, and that is that there is a woman somewhere in the background."

"No—I don't believe there is. If the prosecution had unearthed even a hint of another woman, I should simply have thrown up my hands, granted that he did murder his wife, for that would be both a masculine and a feminine explanation, because it's so plain human. No, I don't believe there is—I stick to my conception of John Dascome. What I'm wondering is, what is he going to do now he has his ten millions? He's young—only thirty-six."

"I've been wondering too, Sadie."

Despite his acquittal, Dascome remains the object of general suspicion. Is he villain or saint? See the next instalment of "The Double House," in February EVERYBODY'S—out January 15th.

Hissing Terror

The Very Human Tale of Sharpnose, Who Saved the Life of His Mate at the Risk of His Own. Another Animal Story

By Artemus Calloway

Illustration by Robert A. Graef

AN OWL hooted. From a distance came the hoarse, rumbling croaking of bullfrogs—that carrying, rolling bass tone that many a sojourner in the great south Alabama swamp has mistaken for the bellowing of a bull alligator. A blood-hungry mink slipped softly over the damp and rotting leaves, suddenly froze to the earth, flashed forward; there was a wild, uncanny shriek of terror, a rabbit struggled for a brief instant, then a quick, convulsive shudder—the little killer feasted.

Sharpnose gave but scant attention to all this. Littlefoot was by his side and naught else mattered. The great raccoon was accustomed to the swamp, its night noises, its tragedies—and its joys. Keen eyes searching the blackness, he shuffled easily along, turning now and again to glance at his pretty, slender little mate.

Winter would soon be a thing of the past. Spring was near. The swamp's one trapper had a few days before deserted his cabin on a near-by knoll and sought the town to dispose of his winter's catch of furs. The trapping and hunting season had not yet ended but this was a wise man. The mating season was near. He would leave something for another season.

But what Sharpnose did not know was that enemies more to be feared than the trapper had made their appearance. Enemies that Sharpnose had known and feared in bygone days when he lived nearer the habitat of man. Enemies that had driven him farther and farther into the swamp's fastness to seek new feeding grounds—and safety.

Three men — young fellows — bringing with them two dogs, had taken up temporary abode at the trapper's cabin. They wanted an outing — hunting — and the swamp promised it. They desired coon-hunting where coon-hunting had, heretofore, been unknown.

One of the dogs was a trained coon trailer—and fighter. A long-bodied animal of mixed bloods with hound and Airedale predominating. An animal to be feared—as vicious as he was keen-scented.

The other was less to be feared—an untrained hound puppy. He was no fighter. At times he would run anything for sheer love of the chase—and lose the scent as often as he held it. On other occasions he would trail nothing. Temperamental—perhaps.

But the youthful hunters were happily unaware of this. Both dogs had been highly recommended. That was sufficient.

A light rain had fallen late that afternoon. The sky was yet heavy with threatening clouds. No moon made its appearance. The stars were hidden.

But Sharpnose and his mate cared nothing for that. Their eyes were accustomed to darkness. Ears and nose keen. . . . So they trotted along, side by side, across the swamp's soft carpet, feet occasionally touching the first tender grass of the year.

Suddenly the magnificently marked raccoon halted. Stood rigid. Long, grayish body still as the earth on which he stood. Shrewd, black and white marked face upturned—keen, sharp nose and sensitive ears alert. Then, the hairs on the back of his neck became erect. From his throat there issued a low, angry half-growl, half-snarl. His little mate trembled.

Sharpnose had heard the hunting cry of a dog. Farther away the excited yell of a man. The old raccoon had heard those sounds before. Had many times trembled at that yell. Once, long ago, he had come near finding death at the hands of such enemies.

He sensed, instinctively, that the dogs were on his trail, following himself and his pretty little mate. Something must be done. Sharpnose was an experienced coon. He would profit by that experience. . . .

A short distance away was a sluggish swamp creek, winding and twisting toward its mouth at the river three miles distant. Sharpnose turned toward this stream, Littlefoot at his heels.

The juicy crawfish at a little pond three hundred yards to the right would have to wait. The fat frogs at Cypress Knee Pond would not run away, could be captured and eaten later. But this yelping and yelling death behind would not wait. The dogs were nearer now.

Onward raced the raccoons. Sharpnose was determined to lead his mate away from danger. He was more than ordinarily handsome as he skimmed over the ground three times faster than one would have imagined possible. . . . But he was slower than the crying death behind; would have to depend on strategy.

The breath of the slender Littlefoot was coming in short, quick gasps. She was unused to such rapid traveling. But there was no slackening of pace on the part of her mate. He realized, instinctively, the danger. Every movement of his body showed that. He feared but few things of the wild. Man—and his dogs—that was something else.

The creek was reached and into the cold water went the raccoons. Here, as on land, Sharpnose took the lead. He laid a trail to baffle the dogs; swam up-stream—then down—crossed and recrossed the creek; ran out on half-rotten logs with which the little waterway was plentifully supplied; caused Littlefoot to lay other trails. Then they turned and swam straight down-stream for more than two hundred yards, left the water, raced off to the right for a short distance—back to the creek.

By this time the dogs had reached the point where the raccoons entered the water. They raced back and forth in an effort to straighten out the trail. . . . Now the men were with them.

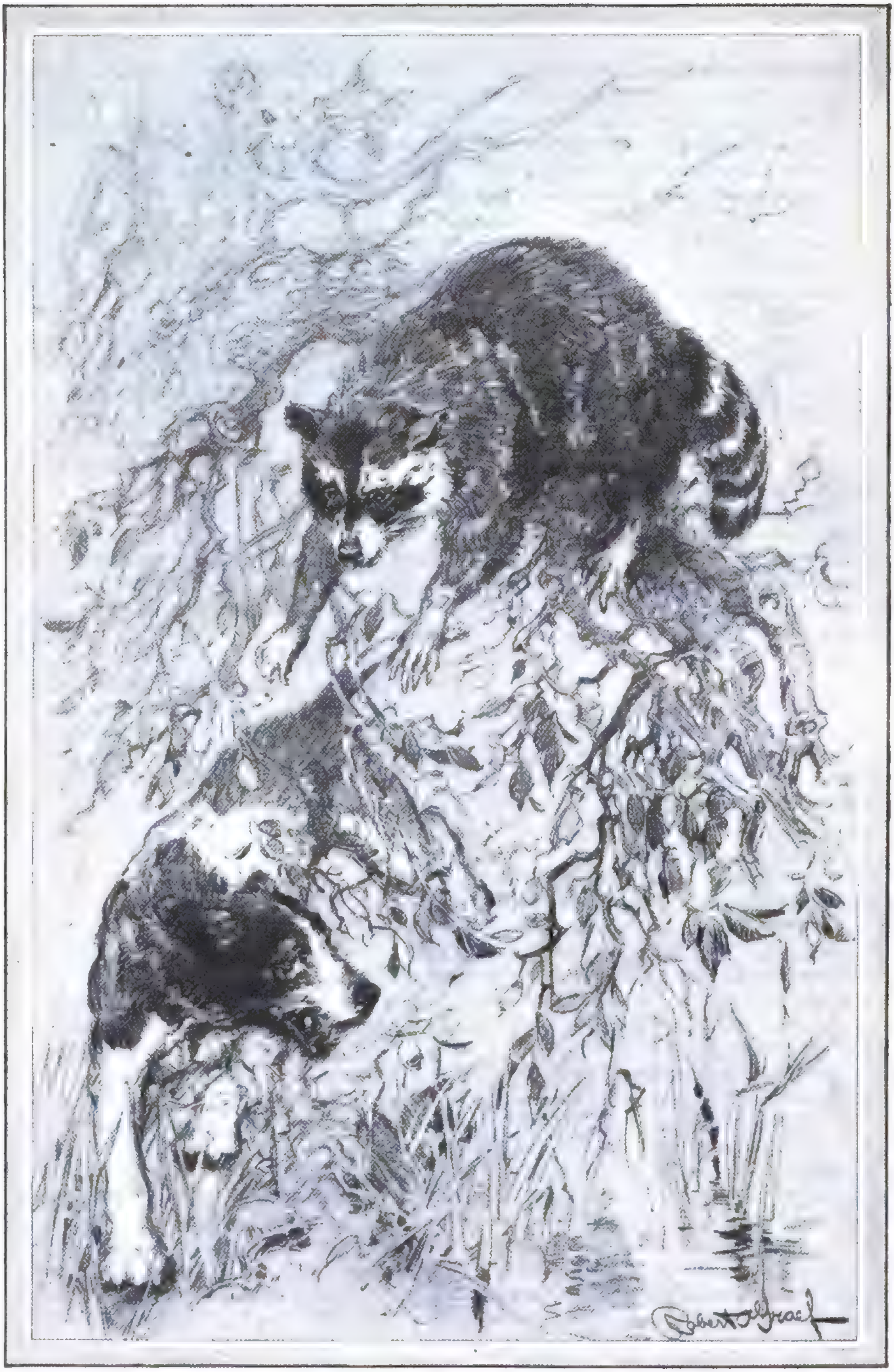
Hours passed. The chase continued. Morning came and finally the dogs were called off. The young fellows and their yelping trailers returned to the cabin, where the dogs were fed and fastened up outside. The men ate and dropping on the trapper's cots—slept. The dogs dozed uneasily, whining in their sleep. . . .

The raccoons found their hollow oak den, remained there during the day. Not until eight o'clock that night did they again venture forth. And then it was because hunger drove them.

SHARPNOSE was very nervous. Littlefoot was, in a sense, the cause of this. She was impatient. Had never before been hunted. Didn't sense the danger. Saw but scant necessity for so much running. And she was ravenously hungry. The plump, fat frogs were waiting. She was going to eat. So she turned toward Cypress Knee Pond. Sharpnose tried to urge her in another direction. Instinct told him that it would be well to learn whether or not the dogs were after them. But the little female would have her way. He followed her to the pond. There they took up positions along the bank, watched and waited, paws itching for prey. . . . Caught and ate a couple each of the delicacies. . . .

Then came the dogs. They were not more than three hundred yards away when they opened up. Littlefoot became panic-stricken. Made as if to climb one of the giant cypresses fringing the placid sheet of water. Sharpnose rushed forward, nipped his mate twice on the leg. Pushed her protestingly into the water. Forced her to swim. Finally succeeded in turning her in the right direction and away they went—across the pond.

The hunters reached the pond only a little later than their loud-mouthed dogs. Took the yelping animals and led them



Robert L. Graef

Full-tongued, the dog came on—reached the tree—was passing. Sharpnose dropped—landed on the dog's neck.

around to the opposite shore where the trail was again taken up, and on—full-tongued—went the dogs after the raccoons.

The sluggish stream where they had outwitted their enemies the night before was some distance away and Sharpnose appeared to know that they could never reach it. Then it was that he was forced to do that which he instinctively knew to be dangerous. Just in the nick of time he forced Littlefoot up a great cypress—followed.

Two minutes later the dogs were leaping and yelping about the foot of this refuge in a vain effort to reach the frightened coons.

Great clouds like the sails of phantom ships scudded across the sky. Now and again a star was faintly visible, but only for an instant. Aided by a great flashlight the men joined their dogs.

And it was by the aid of this light that the raccoons were sighted. Sharpnose came near losing his hold on the branch which held him and crashing to the ground into the very jaws of the waiting dogs when the light flared about him. Near by, his slender, grayish mate trembled with fear. The light was new to her—as it was to Sharpnose. The hunters back in his old home had never used such light. . . . They had been guided by lightwood torches. But this thing was blinding—maddening—terrifying. . . .

"This tree's too big to chop down," one of the enemy announced "And we don't want to shoot 'em. That would knock us out of a fight between the coons and the dogs. John—get your artillery ready. We'll make 'em come down."

JOHN became busy. While the trained coon dog sent his great black and maroon body hurtling against the tree, while the spotted hound roared his challenge, John unfastened a package which he carried. And this package contained something else with which Sharpnose was unfamiliar. It was something that no true sportsman would have used. But these fellows were young—boys, practically—inexperienced in the ways of the woods. They were no vandals. Had the trees and leaves not been damp from the recent rains they would never have done this thing. They possessed that much care.

From his package the one called John took a Roman candle—one containing sixty balls. This he lighted and while another held the flashlight, sent great sizzling, hissing balls of red, white, blue and green fire through the branches of the cypress.

The effect—on the raccoons—was terrifying. Never had they known anything like this hissing terror. They must leave the tree. Started for the trunk. Stopped. They could not go down to those yelling two-legged creatures—the bellowing dogs. Sharpnose nipped his mate rather sharply on the flank. . . . But she failed to take the hint. He must demonstrate his meaning. He did. Made a long, flying leap to the branch of a near-by tree. His queer little handlike paws caught—held. . . . She followed. Landed, half stunned. The hissing fireballs followed. On to another tree they went. The Roman candle burned out. Before a second could be lighted they were four trees distant—a tupelo with a hollow branch. Into this, unseen by men or dogs, they crept. In the rush and excitement the men had momentarily lost sight of them. The dogs continued to yelp about the first tree.

Then there was much arguing. One of the men declared that the coons were in one tree, a second in another. The third, that they had gained the ground and were gone. . . . Blamed the dogs for not finding the trail. . . .

One voted that they fell a certain cypress. Another the tupelo—even struck the tree half a dozen blows with an ax. Decided that the task would be too great. Finally decided that the coons had made good their get-away. The hollow was overlooked.

So away went the hunters to chase other coons, leaving Sharpnose and Littlefoot, for the time being, in safety.

It was near morning when the raccoons ventured forth to seek their hollow oak. They were yet nervous. There was still the fear of the yelling men, bellowing dogs, the blinding, glaring light, the flashing, hissing balls of fire. They would seek yet other trees before gaining the ground.

They leaped, were in another tupelo, then a cypress. Started down. And then from a distance there came a yelp. Littlefoot was startled. Did that which a grown raccoon seldom does, lost her hold on the trunk, came crashing to the ground. When Sharpnose reached her side she was whimpering from fear and pain—with a badly wrenched and bruised foreshoulder.

For a moment he stood beside her. Then forced her to her feet. They must reach the hollow oak home. She forced herself along, through tangled vines and undergrowth—feared the open. They skirted ponds where moccasins would in summer crawl atop logs to sun themselves. Neared a skunk's den, drew away. Once they scented a black bear and kept going. Bears meant nothing in their lives.

They reached home, denned up. But it was two days before they again ventured forth.

In the meantime, something of which they knew nothing had occurred. The trained dog that had trailed them was a vicious brute. His companion was more or less irresponsible—in more ways than one. The day after the coons had been so badly frightened by the hissing fireballs the young hound finished his meal and wandered over to visit the other. Grabbed a piece of meat. The other was at his throat. Before the men could separate them, the young hound had breathed his last. They were left with only one dog. That, however, troubled them but little. They had learned that the young hound had been about as valueless alive as dead. There yet remained the one they could depend on.

Of course they discussed the affair. Had discussed the hound even before the tragedy. Wondered why some of his breed should be good hunters and others worthless. Agreed that the same thing applied to all breeds—some good, some bad, just as with men.

And now Littlefoot's shoulder was far from healed but she must have food and water. Must go forth to forage.

So they left the oak and away they went. Darkness had long since fallen; but they must be careful. The dogs might be near.

An hour was but little more than half gone when the dog found their trail. Again the raccoons took to the stream. Laid false trails.

Then it was that it happened. Littlefoot tumbled down the creek bank, struck a log and hurt her shoulder anew. Slipped into the creek and came near drowning before Sharpnose aided her—by pushing and pulling—in getting out. Raccoons are great swimmers and can—if forced to do so—remain under water for a short time, but a wounded raccoon is at the same disadvantage as any other wounded thing. Now, Littlefoot could not swim. And swimming appeared very essential.

The dog was some distance away, but drawing nearer. Littlefoot writhed on the ground, racked with pain.

Sharpnose, in some manner, sensed that the dog behind was a great fighter. Probably more than his match in a fair fight. There were dogs that Sharpnose could easily overcome. But there was something about this one—and that hissing terror! Those fireballs! Instinct seemed to tell him that this was no ordinary situation; that death was near—for his mate certainly. He might escape by leaving her to her fate. Could easily do so.

HE GROWLED shortly. Littlefoot appeared not to hear. Then he bit her. . . . Bit cruelly. . . . She rose to her feet. He forced her along the creek bank. Turned her toward home. Watched her slowly disappear in the darkness. Stood there. The dog reached the stream, straightened out the trail. . . . Was now coming toward him.

Sharpnose dashed ahead. Ran along the stream for a short distance. Circled, came back and then, apparently, did a very foolish thing—climbed a small tree, stopped on a low-hanging limb directly over the trail he had left. Waited.

Full-tongued, the dog came on. Reached the tree—was passing. Sharpnose dropped—landed on the dog's neck. There was a frightened yelp as dog and raccoon dropped into the cold waters of the little creek. They disappeared. Reappeared—snarling, slashing. And then there was quiet.

Moments passed. A torn and bleeding raccoon gained the bank, glanced back at the creek. Under the water, partly fastened under a submerged log, was a dead dog.

Sharpnose hesitated for only a few seconds. The men were approaching. He saw the gleam of that hated flashlight. . . .

An hour later the great raccoon that had saved his mate through risking his own life watched her ease gently into the depths of their hollow oak home. He followed.

The Log

A Fine, Upstanding Woman Wins, to the Chagrin of the Gossips Who Attack Her

By Edwina Levin MacDonald

Illustration by B. Ney

A TRANSIENT, gasping breath awakening a little moan among the motionless pines slithered away over the newly turned clay of stump-dappled fields, struck against a hewn-log house on a rise of the land, and lifting to an open window, exhausted itself in the flutter of a curtain over the cheek of a sleeping girl. Her black-fringed blue eyes flew open in a blank stare of somnolence which gave place to mild alarm as she noted a pink cloud pushing above the wall of the forest that verged upon the fields.

Turning swiftly to the man at her side, she paused, swept by an involuntary shiver. He lay on his back, one hairy, muscular arm flung above his head, his heavy jaw slightly dropped, his lips parted; a great, uncouth man of the soil. And she thought of what her mother had said on the day of her marriage:

"Well, Aline, you went through the cane-patch, and cut off the stubble. If you were twenty-five—but nineteen! And everybody saying you are the prettiest girl in North Louisiana. To pick a poor farmer with no education! I can't understand it."

Her mother, however, was the only person in Winton who did not understand it—because her mother was the only person in Winton who had not heard the talk. And if she had heard it, Aline felt that she would have been in agreement with the judgment of Winton as pronounced by Mrs. Morris at the annual Sunday-school picnic.

"Where there's so much smoke, Aline," Mrs. Morris had said with calm certitude, "there must be some fire."

And even now, after five years in which Winton had decided to overlook "the affair," Aline could not recall that picnic without a sense of blighting shame and rage and hate. The laughing groups of girls and young men, strolling through the cool dimness of the pine forest, becoming suddenly silent as she approached, to wander away shortly, the girls with arms entwined about one another, leaving her astonished and alone. The boys who had besieged her to dance and ride and walk with them, passing her with sickly smiles to join the other girls.

It had happened fully a dozen times that morning before she could believe that it was more than accidental. That anybody should intentionally snub her was something that she could not easily conceive. That these, her friends, had any such intent was too preposterous. At last, coming upon a whispering group, she demanded: "What's the matter with you girls? You act as if you don't want me around."

"I reckon you know what's the matter, all right," replied Mattie Morris, with a scornful toss of her head. And, even as Aline stared at them too amazed for speech, they sauntered away, Mattie calling back: "How come Dave Pemberton to run away like he did last Saturday—in the middle of the night—without telling anybody he was going?"

THEN it was that she had burst upon the older women who were busy laying white cloths on the ground and opening the lunch boxes.

"I want to know what's the matter with

the girls. What have I done to make them act so silly? And what has Dave Pemberton's going away without saying good-by to anybody got to do with me?"

One of them told her—briefly and clearly. And when the storm of her indignation had subsided, Mrs. Morris had said that thing about fire where there was smoke.

Toward the middle of the afternoon, Jeff found her lying face down by the side of a little creek, her slim body shaken by hard, dry sobs. He sat down beside her, a great uncouth farm-boy, and began stroking her dark hair. She never knew how it came about, or what moved him to lay off his shy reserve, and gather her up into his arms; but there was something so big and gentle and understanding about him that she buried her face in his shoulder and sobbed out the whole story of her disgrace.

"You're too purty fur 'em," he said in his soft drawling voice. "That's whut's the matter. An' I lay my ol' hat against a nickel that Mattie Morris is at the bottom of hit. She's dead sot on ketchin' Ted Barker 'cause his ol' man is président of the bank. An' she knows you could git him at the drap of a hat. Women shore air unmussiful to one another."

After a long silence, he said: "Ef that heifer has sot out to ruin you, hit's es good es done. I seen whut her mother done to a widder woman that didn't have nothin' the matter with her, 'cept she wus too purty. But ef they git too hot fur you, honey, an' you jest naturally cain't stan' hit—I ain't nothin' but a ignorant farmer an' pore es Job's turkey, but I been a-lovin' you all yore life, an' I'll take you an' be glad to git you. I know you couldn't never love me none, but I'll be good to you. An' I'll smash the face of any man that don't speak respectable to you."

Three weeks later she married Jeff. And for five years now, she, who had refused half the well-to-do young men in town, who might have had servants and a fine house, had risen an hour before dawn to the endless round of a farm woman's life, sinking shortly after dusk into the sleep of utter exhaustion.

LAST night they had broken the order of their evening by attending a revival meeting in town. Thus, this morning they had overslept. And looking at the heavy, commonplace face of her husband, Aline shivered. She laid her hand on his arm. Instantly, his eyes flew to the paling sky, and he leaped out of bed.

"That's whut we git fur goin' to preachin' week days," he said, thrusting a leg into a pair of soil-stained trousers. He pulled a blue shirt, faded by many washings, over his tousled, straw-colored undershirt. "I got to git them seed potatoes in by ten o'clock an' go to town fur more. Hit's liable to rain 'fore night, an' they won't be no doin' nothin' with that clay fur a month o' Sundays."

"I'll leave everything after I get the milk put away, and help you," said Aline, who was slipping into a neat gingham dress.

Five years of toil had made little impression on her slim, girlish figure; but the translucent whiteness of her skin, which so often accompanies black hair and blue eyes, had been replaced by a pale golden tint that lent a startling intensity to the eyes under their level black brows. Her forehead was wide and smooth, her features finely cut, but thin to fragility. And the blue eyes held no luster, the soft mouth no promise of a smile.

Jeff laced his shoes before answering her. "You got 'nough to do. I didn't marry you to make no field hand outen you."

Without reply she hurried away to the kitchen. Jeff always objected when she offered to help him in the field; but she always helped when he got in a pinch. And he had to let her. Each year he had hoped that another year he might afford a "hired girl" to relieve her; but he needed help in the fields and couldn't afford even that.

She had a big breakfast of potatoes and meat, eggs, grits and biscuits ready when he came in from feeding the stock. They ate in silence, Aline keeping her eyes on her plate. She never could watch Jeff eat—especially when he was in a hurry. Presently an absence of sound across the table drew her eyes. He had sopped his plate clean, his knife and fork lay as he had used them, to right and left, tips on his plate, handles on the oil tablecloth. His soft brown eyes were fastened on her. And in some strange way the uncouth figure of the man, the heavy, commonplace face and crude manners were lost sight of in the sympathy and self-depreciation of his gaze.

"Honey," he said in the gentle voice that was so at variance with his speech, "I don't know what I could a did different; but seems like, me bein' a man, I ought to of thought of some way to he'p you 'sides tyin' you to a log like me."

"A log is a mighty fine thing to tie to, Jeff, when you're drowning," she said with a faint smile.

"But hit's turrible to go luggin' the log through life, jest 'cause hit kept yore head above water fur a while," he said whimsically.

Rising swiftly, she went to him and drew his big head against her bosom. "It isn't terrible as long as you need it. And I need you, Jeff, just as much as I did that day you found me by the creek."

He drew her close, then rose as if embarrassed by this moment of emotion. "I got to git. The sun's up."

Leaving the breakfast dishes, Aline took a big tin pail and went out to the cow-lot. She let down the bars which served as a gate, with difficulty kept the calf from jumping out of the pen, and drove the cow in. She had a struggle to get the rope over the yearling's head. Whereupon, giving a jerk now and again to shift the greedy mouth, she presently pulled the calf away, bending all the strength of her slight form to the task of tying it off.

When the milking was done, she turned cow and calf together, and went back to the house, where she strained the milk into wide, flat pans, so as to get the maximum of cream, and setting the pans on shelves in the spring-house, removed other pans on which leathery cream had formed. These she carefully skimmed, transferring the cream to the churn. She carried the "blue" milk out to the fattening pigs, returning for the slop from yesterday's dish-washings. After which she filled her apron with corn from the crib, opened the chicken house and fed the chickens swarming about her feet. With a pail, she scooped some cornmeal mush from a huge iron wash boiler in the yard, went once more to the house for a handful of pulverized red pepper, mixed this with the mush and fed it to the chickens. She gathered the fresh eggs, and turned the eggs of a setting hen that had come off the nest to eat.

"Come on, Spot," she said to a big mongrel pointer dog trotting patiently at her heels. "Didn't Jeff feed you this morning? I reckon he was in too big a hurry."

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Spot wagged his tail to indicate that he understood, and followed her back to the kitchen, where his patience was rewarded by a half pone of cornbread. And he trotted off to the field in search of Jeff.

Aline's eyes swept the littered breakfast table, the stack of unwashed pots on the stove, straying to the unmade bed in the adjoining room, the unswept floors. "And I ought to gather my vegetables," she thought, "before the sun wilts them. But Jeff has got to get those potatoes in before it rains."

She put on a sun-hat and went out to the field. Jeff did not look up. Walking between the plowed rows, hoe in hand, striking with monotonous regularity into the loose soil, he left at carefully spaced intervals long columns of three- to four-inch holes. Aline filled her apron from a sack of "eyes" and started down the rows without speaking. Dropping two to three eyes in a hole to insure a sprout, she was yet careful of waste.

When sufficient ground was prepared, Jeff went back and began covering the holes. Aline emptied the sack, then took a hoe from the crotch of a peach tree and starting with the last row worked back to meet Jeff covering the holes, lightly, not too lightly, and yet not too deep.

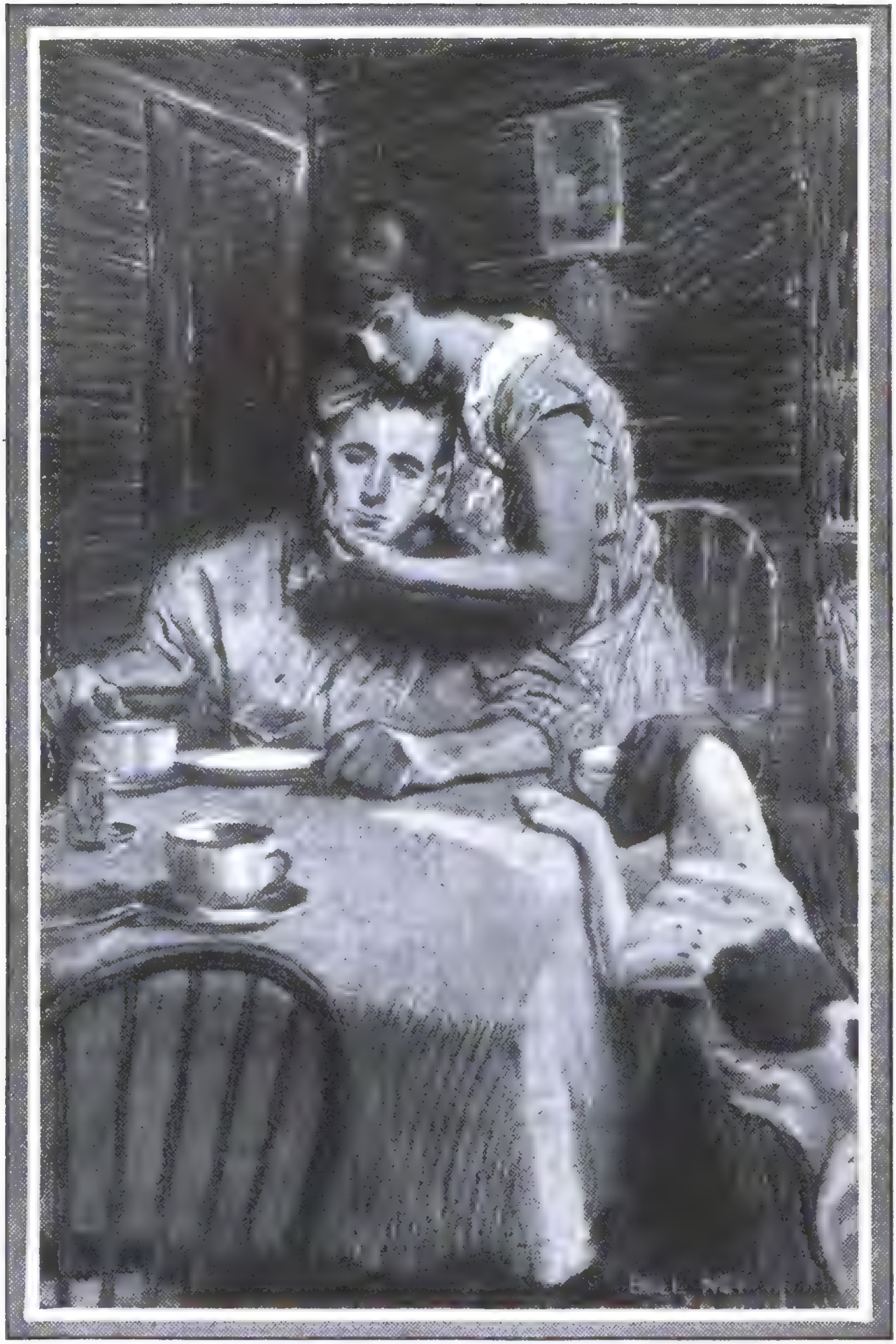
"Well, now I got to git over to town an' git some more seed," Jeff said, looking up at the sun as they met on the final row. " 'Tain't more'n ten o'clock."

They walked back to the house in silence, Spot trotting at their heels. Jeff had accepted her help as he had done dozens of times before, because delay might mean disaster. He hated the necessity, but there was nothing to say.

"DON'T you reckon you better drive over with me," he inquired as he started toward the barn, "an' git that calico you been needin' to put yore quilts together?"

"I reckon so." While Jeff was hitching, she washed the breakfast dishes, put the clean pots away and took a peep in the churn to see how the milk was coming along. "If it isn't ready by the time I get back," she thought, "I'll set it beside the range."

Removing her apron, she smoothed down her gingham dress which, though plain and faded, was fresh and clean, and went into



"Hit's turrible to go luggin' a log through life," he said whimsically. Swiftly Aline went to him. "It isn't terrible as long as you need it."

the bedroom for her hat, a neat sailor of last year's vintage. In the barren living-room she paused before a row of crude bookshelves on which a number of dusty books reposed. She had scarcely looked into a book in five years. Above the shelves hung a large photograph of a young girl in a fluffy summer dress and a flower-laden hat. A pair of laughing eyes beneath level black brows stared down at her. Across the bottom of the plate the enamored photographer had written: "*The Prettiest Girl in Winn Parish.*" He had presented her with the photograph.

Into Aline's eyes came a faintly mocking smile. "I reckon you've changed a lot since then, Aline," she murmured.

"I got to fix this bridge," remarked Jeff as the wagon clattered across a rickety little bridge spanning the creek just before they came into town. "The fust rain'll wash hit out."

He left her at a dry-goods store and drove on to Pemberton's seed store. Completing her purchases, she hurried along the dusty rutted street to the waiting wagon and climbed into the high spring seat to wait for Jeff. More than she hated sitting on that high seat, she hated hanging around the stores. Besides, even while she cringed from the conspicuousness of her humble position, she experienced an arrogant complacence in flaunting her indifference to the stares of those who recalled her driving about these streets in the best cars the town could afford.

Mattie Morris passed her in a new Dodge sedan—Mattie Barker now, for she had succeeded in getting Ted Barker. And it was general talk that she spent more than his salary, as teller in his father's bank. He owed everybody.

Jim Rowley, a rising young lawyer, drove by. He lifted his hat to Aline. And it seemed to her that his supercilious smile called attention to the difference in what her position was on the high seat of an old wagon, and what it might have been as his wife, in his sporty roadster—if she hadn't turned him down to run around with Dave Pemberton, and got herself talked about so that no self-respecting man could marry her.

Several women went by on foot. They nodded coolly. But to-day, there was unwonted curiosity in their glances. Aline looked away when now and again one of them appeared to be on the point of stopping. She was in no mood for the air of Christian forgiveness the town had taken toward her since her marriage.

Presently, Jeff came out and fussed around without doing anything. She wondered what he had come out for.

"Dave Pemberton's in the store," he said after a space. "I thought I'd tell you," he added awkwardly.

Dark color flooded her face. It was like Jeff to prepare her for the inevitable meeting. She made no reply, and he went back into the store. Almost immediately, Dave came out.

"HOW are you, Aline? Jeff told me you were out here." He extended a hand.

"I hear you are doing big things in New York with your crazy pictures, Dave," she said with a friendly smile.

"Yes, I've made good." He stood with his red head bared to the sun as is the custom of Winton men when talking to a woman. He had bronzed in the five years he'd been away, and his clothes fitted his fine tall form as they had not done in the old days; but the fire in his eyes was undimmed and his wide boyish smile was the same.

"You were the only one in this town who saw anything in my stuff and who didn't think I was a fool and a bum," he added.

"I never thought they were pretty, Dave," she reminded him with somewhat of the old whimsical light in her blue gaze.

"But you thought they were funny. You caught the idea."

"And the New York papers caught the idea, and are paying you big money."

"I almost starved at first, though. Went three days without food once. Washed dishes. Everything. And half convinced that dad was right—that I was just a bum."

"What made you fly off in such a hurry, Dave, without saying good-by to anybody?"

"Dad and I had a dickens of a row. You remember the day I took you for a ride in his old car, and we went to gather dogwood blossoms, and let the car stand by the side of the road, and meddlesome Jim Lewis came along and towed it in, and we had to walk back to town?"

"I remember," she said grimly.

"Well, dad told me I had to get, that night. And I got—on the midnight train. I was so mad I never thought of waiting till morning, not even to say good-by to my friends."

ALINE laughed bitterly. "Well, Winton put its own construction on our leaving the car three hours on the road (somebody timed us) and your running away that same night. This is a Christian town. It doesn't tolerate even the appearance of evil."

He was staring up at her in speechless amazement. "My God!" he said at last. "And that's why you married Jeff."

"That's why he married me," she corrected. "I was only nineteen. I was ashamed to tell mama, and afraid. I had no money to go away, and no place to go. And such things are very tragic when one is nineteen. Jeff opened his big sympathetic arms to me, and I was glad to crawl into them. He's good to me; and Winton has pardoned me, in a way. It isn't Christian not to pardon a sinner."

"My God!" repeated Dave. "Aline, why didn't you let me know?"

"What good could you have done? You say you were starving. Besides, even if I had known where you were, I'd have been ashamed to tell you a thing like that then. I'm older now—and married."

A silence fell between them. Then he said: "It's no good telling you, Aline—I didn't tell you then, because I was scared to death of the future; but I want you to know that I always intended, if I made good, to come back and get you, if I could. Somehow, I thought you liked me." He waited for her to speak. She kept her eyes on her hands, folded in her lap. And he went on: "Of course, neither of us knew what love was then. But you were the only one who ever understood my ambitions. Maybe it was because you were ambitious yourself in those days. Do you still keep up your singing?"

"No. A farm woman has no time for such things."

His gray eyes drifted away to the distant pine forest stabbing into a remote blue sky. "And there's that," he muttered. Then his eyes came back to the thin tanned face, once oval and of translucent whiteness. All the girlish prettiness gone; but in its place was mystery, touched by a gentle melancholy and an infinite sweetness. The loveliness of her features was increased by their fragility, and when the black fringe of her lashes was lifted, there was something almost improbable in the beauty of her large deep blue eyes, set in the small golden face with its frame of ebon hair.

"Well, good-by, Aline," he said after a long silence.

"Good-by, Dave." She gave him her hand. He held it for a moment; then, restoring his hat to his head, walked up the street.

Jeff, as usual, drove home in silence. He helped Aline get a quick "snack" for dinner, and together they cut the eyes from the new seed potatoes.

"Jeff, the milk is ready," said Aline, when they had finished. "I'll have to churn, or it will spoil. I'll be out to help you as soon as I can."

"I don't want no he'p," he said almost fiercely; and, shouldering the sack of potato cuttings, he stalked off to the field.

Aline stared after him in surprise. It was the nearest he had ever come to speaking unkindly to her. But when she had churned and washed the butter, and poured up the milk, she went to the field. He did not look up from the business of chopping comfortably spaced holes in the long rows. Neither spoke. They talked little always; only what was necessary, as a rule about the work.

When the seed was all in and covered, the sun was down. They walked back to the house, he to feed the stock, do the night milking and cut a supply of stove-wood for to-morrow; she to wash the noonday dishes, get supper and strain away the fresh milk. He helped her with the supper dishes, and she made the bed and they turned in for the night.

"Well, now let 'er rain," remarked Jeff. He was soon breathing heavily.

Tired though she was, Aline could not sleep. To think Dave had come back after five years! Some said he was getting ten thousand a year for his funny pictures. But, of course, that must be an exaggeration. How well he looked! And how cheap Ted Barker and all the other Winton sports appeared beside him! That was what the city did to one. If her father had lived she would have gone to Cincinnati to study voice. She had gone as far as the Winton and even the Ruston teachers could take her. What would her life have been if she had gone to Cincinnati? She wouldn't have married Jeff, of course. Nor likely Dave.

It was curious that Dave had kept her in his mind all this time. And he had always meant to come back for her. Well, she hadn't known that; and anyway, she hadn't been in love with Dave. She had liked him better than any of the others, and had thought his pictures were clever, and felt sorry for him because every one made fun of him. But as for loving him— For that matter he hadn't loved her. He was grateful because she helped him to believe in himself by believing in him when he was so eager and so afraid. It was like him to want to pay her back by taking her out of Winton. How wonderful it must be to live in a big city where so much is always happening that people don't have time to bother about the affairs of other folks!

FUNNY how upset she had been ever since she'd seen him. Not so funny either when you thought about the amazing part he had unconsciously played in shaping her life. Well, that was over. She was glad she'd seen him. She was glad to know the straight of why he had left that night. Not that she had been particularly hurt by the mere fact of his going; but she had wondered why he hadn't mentioned it that afternoon. It was so sudden. Then Winton had made so much of its happening as it did after they had deserted the car and "taken to the woods." Her cheeks burned in the darkness as she recalled the expression.

Anyway, it was a good thing he had gone. There would have been talk just the same. Mr. Lewis's officiousness in towing the empty car had advertised the perfectly innocent excursion as an indiscretion. Dave would probably have married her out of hand and settled down to a clerkship in his father's store. He was so impulsive.

Her heart pounded in painful throbs. In a way, she wished he hadn't come back. The sight of him had opened that old sore. And she had tried to forget it. She wondered if he had found her greatly changed. He must have met a lot of pretty girls in New York. Strange he hadn't fallen in love with one of them and married. Well, now that he'd seen her again, and that she wasn't pretty any more, he probably would find some one.

An unspeakable sickness swept her at this thought. A weight seemed to settle on her chest. She turned on her side and tried to sleep; but four o'clock found her eyes fixed achingly on the blackness of the forest beginning to outline itself against the paling blackness of the sky. A clock struck loudly.

"Jeff!" she called. "Four o'clock!"

He came out of bed with a thump on the bare floor. Giving a swift glance to the star-illumined night, he remarked: "Well, hit didn't rain. Air shore felt like hit."

After three days of sultry, sticky breathlessness, and a lowering sky, Jeff walked into town to see Ben Stebbins about a pair of oxen he had to sell.

"Why don't you take one of the horses?" Aline asked. "It's so hot you're likely to get sunstroke."

"Lil's ailin' and Tobe is in the pasture. More bother to go git him than to walk to town."

It was mid-afternoon, and Louisiana, swamp-land and hill country, lay fainting in the imponderable heat. Not a leaf stirred among the fruit trees and the leaves of the lilac bushes in the yard and the weeds in the fence rows, even the willows growing along the creek, hung limp under their thick coating of dust. Aline, having finished the morning work without interruption, brought the blocks for her new quilt out on the veranda and began joining them together with strips of the new calico she had bought. Neither she nor Jeff had been to town since, and she did not know whether Dave had gone back to New York or not.

Her hands were damp and perspiration trickled over her body under her gingham dress. "I'll have to find something cooler," she thought, and laying her work down went in and changed to an old pink muslin that she had redipped and laundered on ironing day.

"Out of style, but good for hot days," she mused, trying not to recollect other days when she had worn it as the beauty of Winton. That it brought out the rich gold of her skin, the intense blue of her eyes and the blackness of her hair, she did not realize.

She had started back to her work on the veranda when the telephone bell rang—one long and three shorts. Jeff was on the line. "Jest got into town. Hotter'n blazes. Bound to have that rain to-night. I met Dave es I wus crossin' the creek. Jest started out to tell us good-by. Leavin' fur

New York to-morrow. He wanted to turn back an' come out with me, but I told him I mightn't git through tell late—Ben's a hard bugger to trade with—an' fur him to go on out, that you wus by yorese'f an' would be glad o' comp'ny. Tol' him to wait tell I got back, an' stay to supper. Thought you might want to do a little fixin' up."

Nausea assailed Aline as she hung up the receiver. She wondered how many ears had heard that Dave was coming out to see her, and that Jeff was in town. She didn't know whether she was glad he was coming or sorry. She had not been able to keep her mind from him these three days. She had wanted to see him as she had never wanted anything in her life before. And now the thought of seeing him filled her with panic. There would be talk. That was probably what was the matter with her. Somehow she never could get over caring what people said. Jeff ought not to have telephoned. But of course he thought she wouldn't want Dave to see her in her kitchen dress. It was like his thoughtfulness.

She went hastily to the press. "He mustn't see me in this thing," she said aloud. As her hand reached for a fresh gingham, she paused. "Why not? The worse I look the sooner he'll forget that foolishness about wanting me." Then, inconsistently, she burst into tears, adding with equal inconsistency, "I'll look like a fright," and ran to remedy the matter by washing her face.

AT FIVE o'clock a curious yellow haze hung over the land. Not a breath of air stirred lilac or bridal wreath, or even the heads of the big umbrella china trees in front of the house. Dun-colored clouds were rolling up in the south but the sun hung like a ball of brass in the west. As Dave reached the gate, the ball seemed to drop as by magic from the sky, and a hurricane of wind swept round the place, lifting stray papers, turning over buckets, and whirling them about with a clatter, carrying frightened chickens off their feet in their scurry for shelter. The yard trees and shrubs lashed their branches together and the pine forest enclosing the fields strained and moaned as in agony.

Without greeting Aline and Dave ran inside the house to fasten the window shutters that were banging furiously.

"Close the kitchen door, Dave," cried Aline. She flew to fasten the front door. It had grown almost night-black outside. The sturdy log house shuddered. Still no rain had fallen.

"Been a long time since I've seen a real hurricane," laughed Dave.

Aline lighted the lamps. The house seemed to shake itself like a great dog. The telephone bell rang incessantly. "All the farmers trying to talk before the lightning starts," smiled Aline. "Wires will all be down to-morrow."

Now came one long ring and three short. "Been tryin' to git you fur fifteen minutes," said Jeff. "Everybody talkin'! You an' Dave go ahead an' have supper soon es hit's ready. Looks like this blow'll be good fur two three hours. Mebby longer. An' hit'll proba'ly take the creek bridge so I'll have to come 'round by the county road. An' they ain't no sense in Dave tryin' to git back to town to-night. The county road's been built since he left an' hit'll be dark es Egypt. Tell him to make up his mind to put up with pore folks to-night. I'll be home soon es I kin, but don't wait up. Hit's bound to be late when——"

There was a deafening crash of thunder, a glare of quivering light, and the line was dead.

Aline repeated what Jeff had said. Dave looked at her curiously but said nothing.

"Come on out in the kitchen, Dave," she said, "and I'll get us some supper."

He insisted on lighting the fire while she mixed cornbread and stirred up some biscuits. Then he sat down, and while he talked about New York she could feel his eyes on her as she set the bread to bake, fried ham, eggs and potatoes. She brought out a cold beef roast, a sweet potato pie and some cold vegetables and homemade peach preserves and invited him to draw his chair up to the table.

They sat down opposite each other and as she started to carve the roast their eyes met across the table, drawn suddenly together by some startling thought. Her eyes fell.

"Have a biscuit, Dave, and cut the cornbread," she said, beginning to carve the roast. "I reckon you don't get much but light bread up in New York."

"Baker's stuff at that." He laughed embarrassedly, passing the biscuits to her.

"Must be terrible up there in the winter time," she remarked, talking hurriedly.

"We had two inches of snow last year, and Mrs. Slater's little girl said she'd found out all the fun in the world was in the countries where there was snow every year. That there was nothing to do in hot countries but fan."

Neither of them ate much, but they talked a great deal. Outside, the wind howled in ungoverned fury. The shutterless kitchen windows sprang now and again into a shimmering blaze that lasted for several seconds together. The yard trees cried out and the house trembled.

When they were putting away the dishes, the rain descended. It came in the torrential downpour of the hot climates. A whelming deluge of wind and water as if the heavens had parted, letting their entire burden out at once.

A chill had blown up on the storm and Dave lighted a fire in the living-room. He strayed over to the bookshelves, took out one of the dusty books and opened it.

"Read as much as you used to?"

"One doesn't have time for reading on a farm."

He put the book back and without speaking came and sat before the blaze with her. The violence of the storm increased.

"How long do you reckon it will last?" she asked after a while.

"You know how these tropical storms are. Stars may be out in an hour. Then again, it may last all night."

A look of fright came into her eyes. Presently she rose. "I'm used to going to bed early, Dave. That's your room, second door. I've heard folks go to bed all hours in New York. You can read, if there's anything there, or do whatever you want."

"Thanks, Aline. I have a New Orleans paper in my pocket. Don't worry about me. I'll wait up awhile for Jeff. Storm may break soon."

"Good night, Dave."

"Good night, Aline."

As she closed her door, his eyes strayed around the big room with its rough unpainted walls, the crude book-shelves, the organ in one corner, the old-time whatnot, the oak chairs, hideous center table and bare floor. "And she loved beauty so," he murmured. "Poor little Aline!"

He sat still for a long time. The storm gave no sign of abatement. Rather seemingly it had renewed its forces. He got up and, turning out the lamp, went over to one of the front windows and stood looking through the slatted shutters. Aline lying in bed also watched through half-turned shutters. The lightning kept the yard illuminated almost continuously. Suddenly one of the enormous china-trees swayed to the wind, seemed to brace itself for fight, then went down with a tremendous crash.

Aline sprang up and, drawing on a kimono, ran into the living-room, lighted only by the glow from the fire. "Dave! Are you up?"

He came out of the shadows. "Here, Aline. It was just that china-tree by the gate toppled over. Topheavy, probably."

As he spoke there was a crash like the breaking up of all the outbuildings. The sound was drawing on toward the house. Something struck it with a terrific blow. There was a cracking, a breaking and splintering; then a thud. The house rocked on its heavy foundations. The rafters strained and creaked.

WITH a scream Aline ran to David. His arms encircled her. When the terror of sound had settled down to the fury of the storm, he spoke. "That was probably the other china-tree; its top struck the side of the house. Good thing they're gone. Too much top and too little root. They aren't safe." He spoke casually, but his voice was husked. He still held her close.

She moved as if to draw away. His clasp tightened. "Aline," he cried, the words tumbling out, "I can't let you go! I can't stand to see you like this. I owe my courage—to you—all that I have done. When I was starving and had lost all faith in myself I remembered you had faith in me, and I kept on. There have been women in my life since I left but always I thought when I got ready to settle down I wanted you. With a boy's egotism I suppose I thought you'd be waiting for me. It was a shock to me to find you married though I might have expected it. And I could have gone away, if I'd found you happy, or even comfortable—if you had a single chance! But you haven't. Not one. And I can't leave you to wear yourself out on a farm—and with Jeff. He's a man, Aline, all through; but he isn't for you. He's bound to know that. He'll give you a divorce if you ask him. He won't hold you. You've got to ask him, Aline."

She had lain quiescent in his arms throughout the torrent of words. Now she moved her head, tilting it backward till the lovely fragile face lay upturned on his breast.

"Yes. Jeff would give me a divorce if I asked him. He's that kind." The words sighed themselves out, as if she were too tired to speak.

"You'll ask Jeff to—give you a divorce, dear?" His eyes held the sweet mouth hungrily but when he bent his head slowly toward her she turned her face away and he did not press his will. "You'll ask him, Aline?"

"No, Dave, I couldn't do that to Jeff. He's too good."

Her unfaltering gaze held him. His eyes fell first—fell to the firm little chin. And he drew a long quivering breath. "No—I guess—you couldn't. If you could—you wouldn't be you——"

She moved her head so that only the shining black hair was presented to him. He rested his cheek on it, holding her, holding her against the heavy pounding of his heart. Presently, her voice came up faintly. "Dave, please let me go." She did not struggle in his arms, and he laid his cheek against her forehead. After a timeless silence he lifted his head with a jerk like that of a defiant boy yielding himself to a thrashing. His arms loosened. He led her to a chair and pressing her gently into it, drew her kimono together over her knees. Straightening up, he looked down at her.

"I reckon you don't want to go back to bed?" he said, falling into the colloquialism of his boyhood.

"No." She stared into the fire. Her hands dropped, palms up, in her lap.

He went into her bedroom, came back with a pair of old bedroom slippers and, kneeling down, thrust her feet into them. She smiled faintly down at him, and for one instant his determination seemed to desert him. He laid his head against her knees. Her hand went out to the bowed red head. At her touch, he got up.

"I'm a brute," he said fiercely. He brought stove wood from the kitchen, replenished the fire, and sat down on the opposite side of the hearth from her. They talked fitfully—about the storm; other storms; northern climate. She asked him about his work. He answered her questions. Never a word about the thing that lay on their hearts.

The wind died down. The rain stopped as it had come—suddenly, completely. Dave rose. "Guess I better be getting back to town."

Something like fright dawned in her eyes. But she said: "You'll have to take the county road."

She went out on the veranda with him. Water ran in little rivulets from the eaves of the house, and the wide, shallow spread of china-tree roots lifted like two enormous lids of red clay above the gaping holes they had left. One end of the veranda had been torn away by the brush of heavy limbs. Peach petals lay like pink hail on the southern slope. And all the trees and shrubs were bowed grievously. But the air was silken. No cloud speck marred the approaching dawn.

"Well, good-by, Aline." His eyes held her hungrily.

She glanced away. "Good-by, Dave." She gave him her hand.

His gaze shifted. "Good-by, Aline," he repeated, and dropped her hand.

She watched him go down the walk. He fumbled at the gate, then got it open, and went down the road without looking back. At the turn he paused; then quickened his steps. The brush hid him.

WHEN Jeff came in, she had breakfast ready. "I expect it's ruined," she said. "Been on the stove for over an hour. I ought to have waited till you got here. Ground too wet for work, anyway."

"Yep. Jest like glue. No peaches this year. Met Dave on the road. Seemed like he wanted to pass without speaking."

"I've had mine," she said as she poured his coffee. "Couldn't wait."

He ate awhile in silence. "I allow all the farmers fur miles'll know Dave spent the night here, an' befo' night the whole town will know I wusn't home." She made no reply, and presently he spoke again.

"Gal, I reckon I ain't a-lovin' you like I wus five years ago."

"Why, Jeff, what's the matter?"

"I reckon hit's all this 'ere talk. Kinder gits under a man's skin to have women lookin' down on his wife, an' the men eyein' him sorter pitiful, like he's married a sinful woman."

"Jeff!"

"Course, that ain't the whole trouble," he went on, cutting an egg in half. "I need a good strong woman, an' you need a diff'unt man. An' I reckon this 'ere marriage business is jest a sort of partnership; an' a partnership that don't he'p nobody ain't wo'th a hoot in hell, I don't kere whut kind of papers has been drawed. Nobody cain't git fur draggin' a log over dry land."

Her eyes filled. "I know that's all I've ever been to you, Jeff."

He looked up, his brown orbs soft and kind and glistening. "I ain't a-sayin' that, gal. You've did yore best, an I reckon ef hit wusn't fur this 'ere new cud the Winton heifers'll be a-chewin' we mought of rocked along tell you wus in yore grave, an' my back wus broke with farm work. But seein' es how hit is, I 'low I'll let Stebbins have the place. He's been wantin' hit fur quite a spell. He'll pay me a thousand cash, an' the balance in two, three and five years. I've had hit in my mind fur quite a while to try minin'. I worked es a mucker oncet when I wus a boy, an' I'll hit fur the West. I got 'bout a hundred dollars in the bank. That's 'nough fur me. An' you kin have the thousand Stebbins pays me, an' I'll send you more when I can." He talked rapidly, almost without pause, as if determined to get it all out at once.

"Jeff, do you mean to say you want to leave me because of what Winton will say about—last night?"

His eyes fell, and the dark color mounted to his straw-colored hair. "I reckon I jest natcherly ain't a-lovin' you, gal, like I wus," he said in a shamed voice, "an' hit takes a heap of love to put backbone in a man when everybody an' everything's agin him. I reckon I ought to have my neck broke, fur ownin' up to the facts. Mebby hit's bein' more of a man to lie—or jest to run off with some other woman; but I'm too ignorant to be anything but honest."

He pushed back his chair and, coming around to her, laid a hand on her shoulder. "You cain't mate a hummin' bird an' a bee, an' expect 'em to keep house together, honey. 'Tain't yore fault an' 'tain't mine. God made us diff'unt. That's all."

Aline could never afterward quite recall that last week. Jeff was unfailingly kind, helping her in every way possible. He put through the sale of the farm, the stock and the furniture with surprising dispatch, and would not hear her protests about the thousand dollars. "You've earned hit an' more, too," he insisted. "That's only two hundred dollars a year. I got plenty an' there'll be more comin' in."

But when she tried to talk further with him about his decision he refused to talk. "I've said all I had to say, honey," he replied, a shamed expression coming into his face. "Hit makes me feel like a worm."

They took the train together as far as Alexandria. "We kin part here," he said with a whimsical smile, "so es the heifers'll miss the grass."

Spot had accompanied them; he muzzled her hand as her train whistled for the crossing. She stooped and, putting her arms around his baggy neck, kissed him between his soft brown eyes.

"Take care of Jeff, Spot," she said. "He was good to me for five years."

"I ain't aimin' to be mean to you now, gal," Jeff said as she straightened up.

"No, I don't think you are, Jeff."

Her train rolled in. He helped her into her seat, brushed her cheek lightly with his lips and tramped out and across the street to the Junction Hotel.

WHEN the faint whistle of the outgoing train could be heard at the last crossing, he sat on the side of a sagging bed in an upstairs room staring into the eyes of Spot, who sat on the floor directly in front of him. "Well," he said, "we had her fur five years, an' I reckon that's es much heaven es any man's got call to expect in this world. I seen hit in his face that mornin' that he wanted her turrible, an' he kin give her whut's comin' to her. But, oh, God! Hit wus turrible to let her go. Specially thinkin' whut—she's a-thinkin'."

Spot's eyes strove to express his understanding. And the eyes of man and dog were strangely alike—soft and brown and shining—finding all of love in giving.

Presently, resting his elbows on his knees, Jeff dropped his head in his hands, and Spot took the liberty of climbing on the bed, where he sat leaning his big body against his master. Neither moved for a long space.

The door opened, closed. "Jeff!"

Jeff came upright. "Aline, whut you doin' here?"

"I got off at the water tank and a man in an automobile brought me back. My trunk's gone on," she finished with a nervous laugh. Then, as if afraid of what he might say, she hurried on.

"JEFF, when you turned away from the station, your shoulders drooping, your feet dragging as I'd never seen them, it seemed as if all at once I understood—things. You thought that Dave—that I—Jeff, I did think for a little while that I cared for Dave; but I know now that it was just getting away from Winton and the farm that I cared about. I was crazy to get away—but I don't want to get away without you. There are things that we are so used to having we don't even know how necessary they are to us until we are about to lose them or have lost them. Jeff, there's lots of money to be made in the mines, and I won't have anything to do but keep house. No cows, or pigs, or chickens, or anything. It won't seem like work. You didn't tell the truth, Jeff, when you said you didn't love me. I know you didn't."

His eyes shifted from her lovely pleading face, but he shook his head stubbornly. "I ain't denyin' I love you, gal, since you caught me like you done, but I ain't aimin' to let you come back. Dave's a-lovin' you. I seen hit in his face when I met him on the county road, an' he's educated and can give you fine things—everything that's comin' to you. I cain't give you nothin' but—nothin' that's wo'th havin'."

He kept his eyes on the floor. Spot had jumped guiltily from the bed at Aline's entrance. Now he came and nuzzled her hand. She drew a sigh.

"Well, then," she said slowly, "will you let me take Spot? Uncle Ned said I could have one of that new litter of pups, and I'll trade you. They are full-breed pointers and Spot isn't even half-breed. He's no good as a hunter, or for anything."

Jeff dragged his wretched eyes up to her. "Honey, don't ast me that. Couldn't no fine dog take Spot's place. I know he ain't wo'th his salt some ways, but he's so lovin'. Seems lak I jes' cain't give him up."

Aline laughed softly, and with a swift step crossed to him, laying her hands on his breast. "Course you can't, Jeff. No fine dog could ever take his place. He's so loving, and that counts more than all the other things, doesn't it, dear? And that's why I can't give you up, Jeff. Gold isn't more gold because it's polished. Maybe not as much when it's molded into fine things. Put your arms around me, Jeff. I want to cry."

He struggled a moment, then his great arms went around her. "Honey, air you shore?" His voice broke.

"I'm sure. I don't see how I could have lived with you so long and not been sure."

He lifted her clear of the floor, swinging her under one arm as if she were a child. "I got a good mind to march right down into that there hotel lobby and tell them pore devils I seen settin' 'round thet this 'ere pocketful of sweetness I got under my arm is my wife," he chuckled. "Only, hit might make 'em mob me."

Two Novelettes in February

Stephen French Whitman's

The Ladies of Boccaccio

The side-splitting experiences of a group of moderns who turn back and view movie land through their Italian master's eyes

Gerald Mygatt's

First Degree

A fine girl's devotion to a helpless cripple handled in a way to make the type of melodramatic story that every one likes

February *EVERYBODY'S* Out January 15

Unto the Children

The Majestic Redwoods Live Again in These Appealing Chapters from the Life of Uncle Jim Bascom

By Austin Hall

WHEN Jim Bascom, robust and thirty, passed through the Santa Clara Valley in the year 1867, he gave but cursory attention to the bare, swept plain that then bordered San Francisco Bay on the south. There were mountains to the westward; and Jim was always interested in mountains. The buckboard rustled through the dust with the man and his seven-year-old daughter perched on the scant seat, both of them watching, with straining eyes, the blue haze in the distance.

The man held his whip and pointed. "Over there is where they are, Bessie—the big trees and the mountains that look down at the ocean."

The girl hung onto the irons; in her eyes there was more blue than there is in all the distance; and back of the blue were the wonderful dreams of childhood. The big trees were soon to be—the trees that, for months, had been the sole subject of her father's conversation.

They had started a year before, when Jim Bascom, a widowed lumberman of Vermont, had harkened to a returned miner, who spoke contemptuously of the Vermont woods, and told of a forest whose trees were immense beyond calculation. Men had laughed at the story; but Jim had listened. He wanted to see those trees, redwoods beyond number; trees of a kind that he had never known, but whose very name seemed synonymous with enchantment. It had not been in the woodsman's nature to resist that call.

At the little village of Los Gatos, Jim drove the horses into the magnificent gorge, where for the first time they caught the scent of the leather-leafed madroña and the crooked manzanita, a place of enchantment, flooded with cadent sounds, rippling waters, and the music of real bells that echoed and rang along the walls in an elfish tintinnabulation; punctuated and undertoned by the rumble of ponderous wheels and creaking brakes. Jim drew up alongside the road just as the bell team appeared around a bend, the bell-hamed leaders nodding ahead, followed by six horses, with the fifth chain hanging loose, and the great, heavy wagon crowding behind. As they started down into the creek, the driver, with a quick thrust of his foot, clamped on the giant brakes, and then, when they struck the level, as suddenly released them. Simultaneously, the leaders lowered their heads, sixteen tugs went taut, the chains straightened, and the ponderous vehicle ascended the bank behind the alders. Jim held up his whip. The teamster drew up; he nodded genially.

"Be that redwood you have in the wagon?" asked Jim.

"Shakes," explained the other. "The redwoods begin about two miles ahead."

"Be they as big as they say?" asked Jim. "I'm a timberman. Bess and me have come all the way from Vermont to see them."

"ALL the way from Vermont?" The teamster climbed down and held out his hand. "From Vermont, you say! They have mountains there, don't they? But they don't have redwoods, do they? An' you come all the way to see them?"

"All the way."

"And it wasn't gold that brought ye?"

"I came to see the redwoods," answered Jim Bascom. "To live among them. Gold is a fine thing; but I'm not a mining man. I'm—well, I suppose you'd call me one of these weak nature lovers."

"A nature lover, eh! Well, you an' me has got about the same weakness, then. My name's MacKernan. But you'll call me Charlie. Mountain Charlie is what I'm known by. I live on top of the mountain. We're both weak, Mr.——"

"Bascom—call me Jim."

"Mr. Bascom. But she's a mighty fine weakness. They ain't many as come to the redwoods for love. Most of them comes for greed. It took God a thousand years to grow them trees; but it ain't going to take men long to harvest them, once they get started. You an' me is going to be needed. You go right ahead and see what you see. I ain't got much time for talk. Ask the shake men for Mountain Charlie's place. When you get there you'll find the string hanging outside the door. Go right in. Make yourself to home. You'll find some blackberries and wild honey on the shelf for the little girl—and there's venison and flour. When I get back, I'll help you to look around and get settled."

And so the Vermonters went on, until they came to the head of the gorge, where the first redwoods, two hundred feet high, stood portal. Jim Bascom alighted and took off his hat. Here were the trees! He had heard and he had believed, but for all that, he had doubted that any growth could attain such a proportion; here was an immense basin with mountains bordering the sides, green as far as he could see, mountains, ridges, valleys; all redwoods, a pliocene grandeur that was limited only by the distance. Jim knew woods; but compared with this, the forest that he had known was only brush. Here were silence and grandeur; where God had wrought a masterpiece out of solitude; and where man was nothing.

Mounting the buckboard, he drove the horses into the forest shade, a shade such as he had never known, unending, superb, and beyond translation. The first limbs were a hundred feet from the ground. Except for a few hazels and wonderful groups of fern growth that occasionally reached as high as his head, there was no underbrush; the ground was carpeted with brownish leaves, with creepers of the yerba buena drooping from the banks and tiger lilies growing in the hollows. The road led up from the creek bed, and wound about the lines of the mountain side, dodging the trees, seeking the gulch heads, always ascending. As they climbed, the gulches below them took on the color of green, and the treetops, whose trunks were three hundred feet below, lifted themselves by the roadside. Always there were trees, colossal and unending, million-columned and red-fibered. The air was sweet and cool, and accented by the majesty of silence. Deer trotted across the road, and stopped to gaze at the new intruders.

HALF-WAY up they came across their first man. A tree had been felled, one of the greatest of them all, and was lying athwart the mountain. The limbs were untrimmed; two cuts had been taken from the heart, but the rest was neglected. The man was making shakes. Jim Bascom drew up to watch the man's dexterity with froe and mallet, and to examine this most wonderful of woods. The shakes fairly flew off the froe, straight, clear-grained, perfect. The red-fibered bark, stripped from the cuts, was piled on either side. The bark was fourteen inches thick. The man was old and taciturn, and loath to answer questions.

What would he do with the rest of the tree? Oh, that would lay; it was only a fair tree, and was good for only two cuts; some trees were good for more, and some less, and some for none at all. After the two cuts were done, he would fell another; He had a good eye and did pretty well. Redwood was only good for shakes! The man lit his pipe, and started on another block. Did he know Mountain Charlie? Oh, yes! Everybody knew Mountain Charlie. His place was on top of the mountain, couldn't be missed. He hauled shakes. Everybody hauled shakes—or cut them.

Right there, Jim Bascom made the resolve that he would never cut shakes. He had fallen in love with this great, quiet forest; shakes were a sacrilege! In another hour he had come to the top of the mountain, and here again he was in for a surprise. They had told him that the forest looked down upon the ocean. Now he saw! Below him lay miles upon miles of rolling forest, undulating to the ocean shores, and losing itself in the matchless blue of the broad Pacific. The wind was in the west, and the tang of the ocean's salt bathed the faces of the father and daughter.

Mountain Charlie's home—a rough cabin—was close at hand; in half an hour Jim had biscuits on the way, with venison steaks broiling, and wild honey and blackberries for the little girl. Then they ate.

NEXT day came Mountain Charlie. Under the shade of the great sequoias the two men compared stories. Jim Bascom had come far; and he had come for no other reason than the woods; he would buy a place that he could call his own, and live where he could get the most out of his appreciation of God and nature. Did Mountain Charlie know a place that would suit him?

Mountain Charlie did.

And so they mounted horses next day—Bessie riding with the mountaineer—and rode through the great forest to another ridge that overlooked the ocean, to a patch of eighty acres containing a growth of redwoods even more colossal than those that they had seen. The land bordered the road that led over the mountains, was easy of access, and was for sale. So they continued on to the county seat, and closed the bargain. When Bascom returned, he had the title to eighty acres of the finest redwoods in all California.

And then Bascom cut his only tree. He had to build; and he had to have lumber. Besides, the trees were so close that he must make room to build on. But the tree was not wasted. Because he was what he was, and perhaps because he was weak, he set out to use up all of the fallen monarch. Men laughed when he began to build his house; and when he told them that he proposed to use it all, they derisively bade him build a hotel. And out of their derision he got his idea. He had to make a living and he could do it so. Why not? It was better than going out with ax and crosscut and defacing the work that God had accomplished in a thousand years. He could show his redwoods; but he could not deface them. They were symbols of God.

And because he was what he was, and because he was greater than they, the men of the mountains soon stopped laughing. One does not laugh at the great in nature. They began to love Jim Bascom. They began by calling him Mr. Bascom; but they finished by calling him Uncle Jim.

The fame of his establishment traveled afar. Set in the redwoods, his Sempervirens Hotel antedated, by forty years, a thousand resorts of the present day. Guests came from San Francisco, from the East, and from the four corners of the earth. And of them all, there was not one who did not go away a better man for having known Uncle Jim Bascom. He was like his redwoods, made by God.

Years passed and his locks turned to gray and silver. His daughter grew up and married, then died, leaving another girl child to prattle and play on the lap of an older man. He did not wither; because he was great. Those who sat at his table and heard him say grace—he always said grace for his guests—and listened to his soft booming tones of reverence, attested to his greatness. But Time conquers all. And Time tells the story.

ONE day when the baby Bessie was five years old, a carriage, wonderful for its time, and drawn by snow-white horses, turned in at the gate of the Sempervirens. Jim Bascom had that day dressed his grandchild with his own hands—they could be as soft as a woman's—tied her ribbons, and promised her a number of things. Also, he had dressed himself in his neatest broadcloth. The equipage was driven by a negro coachman. A man stepped out of the back seat, helped a lady to alight, and then picked up a boy, slightly older than Bessie, and placed him upon the ground. The man was dapper and handsome, wore creased trousers, a silk hat, and side whiskers; the lady was trim and frail, clad in voluminous silks, a basque, and a toque bonnet that adorned a wonderful head of hair and a face of rare, refined beauty; the boy, dressed in the prevailing Fauntleroy costume, was like his mother; he had her eyes, blue, wistful, almost yearning; and like his mother, he was delicate.

There were greetings with Uncle Jim

shaking hands all around, and with the boy and the girl going through their most approved curtsies; following which they retired to the part of the hotel that had been set aside for state occasions. The man was Horatio Kenton, timberman, capitalist, and monarch of all the redwoods; the lady was his wife; and the boy, his son. Inside the hotel, the boy and the girl, after a bashful interval, edged into friendship; and while they were doing so, the older people proceeded to get down to the motive and purport of the visit—namely, the boy's health, and arrangements for leaving him a year with Uncle Jim Bascom. For, be it known, Horatio Kenton, although he owned the redwoods, mountains and valleys, and leagues upon leagues of forest, was of the same flesh as his humblest workman. Uncle Jim had a name; the doctor had advised the mountains; and there was no place like the Sempervirens.

After dinner, they went out on the west veranda, where they could look over the miles of forest and watch the sun dropping down to the blue Pacific. One was the king, the other the high priest, of the sempervirens. Jim Bascom thought naught of lucre, and valued the trees only as a glory of nature; the other gloried in the conquest that was to be and the industry that it would awaken. Horatio Kenton was a great man, well known both socially and financially, and a leader of his time; he had come up from nothing, and in the old days had purchased two thousand acres of redwoods for a keg of whisky, a sound mule, a Mexican saddle, a guitar, and two dollars and twenty cents in cash. The seller was a Mexican, one of the heirs to a Spanish grant, who had no use for the land, and considered that pleasure and song were the best part of living. With the mule to ride, the liquor to drink, and the guitar to play he had gone on his way, never to be heard of after. But he had given a start to Horatio Kenton.

And as they talked, Bobbie Kenton, he of the yearning eyes, watched the man of the forest. The lad was frail, delicate, pampered. When the old man advised him to run and play with the little Bessie he was afraid, afraid of the forest, afraid of its somberness and shadow. But he did not fear Uncle Jim; something drew him to the white-haired man. Uncle Jim took him on his knee.

"You have been unkind to the lad, Mrs. Kenton," he said, "unkind through your love; you have kept him too much indoors. What Bobbie needs is the open air."

And the next day, when the carriage bearing his father and mother disappeared down the road, the world changed for Bobbie Kenton. The crown prince of the redwoods had been bound over to their high priest. Uncle Jim had faith in his redwoods, in their majesty, and in nature; the best way to bring up a child was in the open air, because it was closer to God.

IT WAS June. The air was neither hot nor cold, but balmy. The long bell-teams, sporting music, flooding the air with cadence, swung lazily around the mountain bends. The boy, playing with the girl, spent his days in the open; the air was fresh, and fragrant with leafy ozone; there were flowers in the woods, pink oxalis in the clusters, yellow pansies about the tree trunks, and great lustrous paint-brushes to be gathered by the roadside; while in the hollows grew the tiger lilies, and in the darkest corners, the mysterious and never to be forgotten jack-in-the-pulpit. Overhead were the redwoods, somber, magnificent, and beyond the boy's understanding. And there were Uncle Jim and his buckboard; and down below the hotel, not a mile away, was the old shake-maker cleaving the strips with mallet and froe, and piling up the long banks of bound shakes, the shake-maker who was almost as wonderful as Uncle Jim, who told stories and made pancakes by throwing them into the air. There were houses to be made out of the shakes and adventures to be had on the fallen tree trunk.

And again there were the momentous days when the men made ready for the felling of another tree; the building of the staging, the making of the guide cut ten feet up from the ground, the swinging song of the axes, one-two, one-two, one-two, clipping the monster chips and never stopping until the cut, big enough for ten men to sit in, had been completed. Then came the sawing and the wedging, the long, long wait, and the quivering anxiety while the sawyers drove in the last wedges, the sweating, quadrupled strokes with the crosscut, the trembling top, and the rifle-like pops of rending timber, one upon another, culminating in the last pop that signaled the withdrawal of the saw and the retreat to safety; the sad graceful swoop as the monarch dipped its hoary head and fell to its death, slowly at first, then faster, until it had gained the speed of a bullet; the whir of its fall; and last of all the deafening impact as it crashed upon the mountain-side. Then came the echoes, rolling and reverberating, booming the dirge among the forest mountains.

Then there were the days when Uncle Jim hitched the horses to the buckboard, and with the children perched on the seat, drove through the dark forest to the head-waters of the creek, where there were trout in the riffles and more adventures; where he taught Bobbie Kenton to go forth with line and fly and balance himself upon the great logs spanning the pools where lived the speckled beauties; where there was wildness and abandon, driftwood and spraying waters; where the waterfalls and the freshets sang a song that was lifted up and swallowed by the great forest above them. Always there was that forest, unending and primeval, with Uncle Jim to explain and tell the story: how it had been planted by God, long, long ago when the white man had not been thought of. And as he told the story, coming home from the creek, the children would fall asleep, to be awakened by the elfish music of the bell-teams winding through the redwoods.

Then there were the days when some teamster, sturdy and dusty, would stop at the hotel and wheedle the old man into letting him take the youngsters down the mountains, trips that were perilous as well as delightful, with the exhilarating pleasure of sitting, with feet straight out on the high seat, fourteen feet above the ground, while the wagon, drawn by the eight-horse bell-team, creaked its way through the shadows of the forest. And always there were the bell-hamed leaders, ringing music and warning. And there was laughter from the children, with the driver calling: "Gee-haw! Coom now! Geet up!" Following which came the screech of the brakes and the rumble of wheels, until they came to the long bridge that spanned the creek at the bottom of the cañon.

There the alders grew, and the waters rushed on their way to the ocean. Then came the pull to the railroad, where hundreds of men were unloading machinery from the narrow-gauge cars—rough, mustached men who spoke soft words to the boy and girl, and asked, one and all, for the health of Uncle Jim. Here there were candies and other good things, with the men leaning over the counters wanting to buy for the little ones, and talking among themselves of the days that were at hand, of lumber, of the forest and of work—always they talked of work.

They were days for Bobbie Kenton, days in which he grew, in which the color came back to his cheeks. The autumn came and then the winter, with the rains and the winds whipping through the great forest, with the gales tearing at the giant sequoias, freshets in the gulches and the roar of mountain waters, days that were epic to Bobbie Kenton, full of terror and grandeur magnified by his tender years.

Spring came and early summer; and then, one day, the snow-white horses drew up at the gate of the Sempervirens. There were tears and laughter on the part of Mrs. Kenton, a shaking of hands all around, and colorful tales on the part of Bobbie. That evening they sat again on the west veranda and watched the sun sink into the blue Pacific.

And the next day they all set out through the forest, through the sequoias that had stood for thousands of years, on their way to the station. The bell-teams were plentiful that day and there was music from a thousand bells. Machinery was coming into the forest, long lines of wagons, creaking and groaning up the mountains. Occasionally they passed lines of oxen that were to be used as log teams. The mountains stretched for miles upon miles, all sempervirens. The boy had come to love them, with a love that he had learned from Uncle Jim. They were the redwoods. Some day he was coming back! They belonged to his father. Some day they would belong to him. He spoke to the girl.

"Some day I'm coming back, Bessie—back to you and Uncle Jim!"

IN TWO weeks the Kentons were in New York, and Bobbie was in school—a school that was a long way, both in distance and in fact, from the redwoods, where there was no Uncle Jim and no wild nature; but where there was a proportional value of culture and discipline. The world had changed for Bobbie Kenton.

But he never forgot. At first he wrote long letters—laboriously printed—to Bessie and Uncle Jim, letters of longing and homesickness. There were no trees where he was, and no mountains. He received answers from the old man, and afterward from Bessie, telling him what he would know. Always he remembered the redwoods. And he always took pride in his knowledge that they were his own. His father was a forest king; and he would rather be the son of such a father than anything else in the world.

The school days passed, and the prep days, and he entered college, but still he had not returned. In his junior year at the university, he lost his father and mother and was called to New York, where a kind old lawyer, friend of his father, computed his startling wealth—startling to others, but not to Bob Kenton, because almost any one could have wealth. But he was now a forest king, and that was worth more than all the money to be thought of. Old Jim Bascom, the forest man, had become only a dream; but he was still remembered, because Bob Kenton had taken him for a model. To be like Uncle Jim was to be a man.

Always he thought of going back.

Then came his graduation, and on that very night a letter from Bess, a letter with the brevity of a telegram: "Father is in trouble. I can't say more, because I may not have the right. Please tell me whether you will consider a letter of explanation."

BOB KENTON read the letter twice, thrice, and then bought a ticket for California. Six days later he was on a train coming into the basin at the head of the Los Gatos gorge, the same basin that Jim Bascom had entered fifty years before, dark-colored, beautiful; but different. Bob looked for the redwoods here, but he was not disappointed because they were not the ones that he had known. He knew that farther on, after they had passed through the long tunnel, they would come out among the trees that he had known with Uncle Jim, his trees, the trees that made him king. The train would pass straight up the cañon and into the mountain, on the other side of which was the domain of the Kentons. As they cut through the darkness the conductor came back.

"I've seen your face before, my boy," he said. "What's your name?"

"Perhaps you knew my father," said Bob. "My name's Kenton. My father was Horatio Kenton, the timberman. I haven't been among the redwoods since I was a child; now I'm coming back. They were wonderful."

The old man took a deep breath; then he chuckled: "So you're Kenton's boy. An' you're coming back to the redwoods. Glory be! Tell me, lad, do you remember?"

"I have never forgotten," answered Bob. "I have always loved the redwoods; and I have always wanted to come back. I spent a year among them when I was a child, a year with a grand old man, Uncle Jim Bascom."

The white light of day was shining just ahead; and the next instant they were out in the bright glare of the sun. Bob stared through the window, expecting to see the forest. Then he drew back as if he had been shot. He looked out of the window on the opposite side of the car.

The trees were gone!

In place of the sempervirens, stately and majestic, looking down from the centuries, there was a waste and a desolation that broke sheer to the bottom of the cañon. The mountains were terrible; as far as he could see there was but one picture, a slashed landscape, furred with second growth and jungle with a few forlorn snags, blackened and splintered, bearing ghastly witness of what had been.

The old conductor read the look in his eyes; he laid his hand on Bob's shoulder. "My boy," he said, "you loved them, didn't you? I am sorry. We all loved them. But they are gone now! Here is your station. If you reach Uncle Jim in time, give him my regards."

Bob descended into a swirling pool of dust, and into a heat that, for intensity and stagnation, outdid the Sahara. Here was the station where he had come when a boy, where the lumberjacks had bought candy for Bessie and himself, and where the deep shadows had known no end. A number of clattering trucks were taking on some foreigners who had come up on the train; and several of the drivers offered him a ride. But he refused. What a contrast to the place that he had known, with its long bell-teams, ponderous wagons, and sturdy mountaineers. The tragedy made him think of Uncle Jim Bascom. What would Uncle Jim be without his trees?

Sadly he took the road that led down to the long bridge. In the old days this road had been one of the wonder spots, winding under the shadows of the sequoias, with the gray squirrels playing in the tree-tops, and the sound of rippling waters floating up from the bottom of the cañon. Now it was an abomination of brush and slashings. The sun was intolerable and the dust came over his shoe-tops. One of the trucks caught up with him; the driver stopped.

"Better ride," he called. "She's almighty hot and dusty. These mountains ain't no snap."

"No," said Bob. "I'm feeling old-fashioned. I think I'll walk."

Behind the truck was a rig of a different order, an old-fashioned buckboard, drawn by two old dappled grays. An old man in a duster was driving, his chin whiskers working in unceasing movement toward his nose. At the word "old-fashioned" he drew up.

"So you're feeling old-fashioned, young feller? Well then, mebbe you're not too perkish to ride in a buckboard." Then, when Bob had seated himself: "They ain't many of you young whipper-snappers, now'days, that will ride in a rig like this; but I've known some almighty good men, and durn sight better men than they have now, that never rode in anything else. Be you a city whipper-snapper, or a country one?"

"I don't know," answered Bob. "But I come from the city, if that means anything."

"Well, it don't mean much. Be you from Frisco?"

"From New York," answered Bob.

"Oh!" The old fellow reached out with the whip and touched one of the grays. "Then I don't suppose you ever rode in a buckboard. This here one is considerable old, older'n you by a long ways—like Oliver Wendell's one-hoss shay. I bought her from Uncle Jim Bascom. Did you say you come from New York?"

"Yes."

"Hump!" As a suggestion of disgust the word had a superlative intonation; the old fellow went into an abrupt silence. Bob studied the slashed landscape and busied himself with his own thoughts—thoughts that were comparative and full of regret. The forest was gone; the redwoods were no more. They had been planted by God. They had stood for thousands of years. Those were the words of Uncle Jim Bascom. Where was Uncle Jim? This was the old buckboard! Bob had ridden in it when a boy. He remembered the words of the conductor: "If you see Uncle Jim in time——"

JUST in the middle of his thoughts the old man interrupted. "Whoa!" He pulled in the horses. "Young feller, what do you think of these here mountains?" He made a sweep with his arm.

"Mountains are always wonderful," answered Bob, "but these particular ones would be a whole lot grander if the forest had not been cut."

"Yep." The old man fished out a plug and bit off an angry chew: "You said a mouthful. An' where do you suppose that forest went to? Do you know what I call it? I call it the Whipper-snapper Mountains."

"The Whipper-snapper? I don't understand."

"No? Well, I'll tell you. You see that stump yonder? That stump was once a tree three hundred feet high—by my measurement. And there was thousands of others—tens of thousands; as far as the mountains went—the greatest forest that the sun ever shone on. They was here a thousand years. Then one day a white man comes along and buys them for a jackass and a saddle and then, to improve on what God took a thousand years to do, he converts them into a whipper-snapper. By which I mean that it was Horatio Kenton who turned this forest into money and gives it to his son. That's what I call a great trade—the greatest forest in the world for a whipper-snapper!"

"Oh!" Bob felt the imputation; his sadness was being touched by shame. "Are there none left?"

The old man twisted the tobacco to his cheek. "Yes," he said, "there's eighty acres. Eighty acres of the best they was.

They belong to Uncle Jim Bascom. Leastways, they did. Uncle Jim is about done for now."

"UNCLE JIM? The conductor told me if I saw him in time to——"

"Yes," said the man sadly, "Bill Whitten knows! We all know. All the mountains know. They're murderin' Uncle Jim. But a lot they care. It's downright murder! Giddap!" He clutched at the lines. "I tell you, boy, it's enough to make even a hardened old sinner like me get out and weep!"

"Tell me," said Bob.

"I will. You see, this Uncle Jim Bascom is an old pioneer who came out here in the early days to live among the redwoods. And he's lived here ever since. Well, when the forest was all cut and prices went to the sky, they wanted his trees. But he wouldn't sell—not for millions. 'Cause, you see, he was their sort of high priest, seeing's he'd lived with them for fifty years. But the sharks got him at last through some high-fangled finance, and then they sold out to the lumber people. We tried to save the trees by going down to the legislature and having them buy them for a park; but when we got down there, we was only a bunch of rubes. Besides, what's a redwood, until it's cut? It's like that forest that you are looking at—you want to see it because it's gone! When the redwoods are all gone, some one will wake up and set up an awful howl!

"Anyway— There goes another of them automobiles! They belong to the lumber people; them foreigners is the woods crew. They're cutting down Uncle Jim Bascom's trees! When I came by, they had Big Aleck, the tree that stands in front of the hotel, almost down. I didn't see Uncle Jim, 'cause I s'pose he was in the hotel; but I did see Bess. Poor Bess! When that tree falls, Uncle Jim will die of a broken heart!" The old fellow held up his whip imprecatingly: "Oh, if they was only a God!"

Bob reached up for the clenched fist that held the whip. "Perhaps there is a God," he said. "Let us see. Could you drive a little faster?"

"And who be you?" The old man turned. "You say that you're from New York——"

"My name is Kenton—Robert Kenton."

The old man's eyes went wide. "Then—then you're the whipper-snapper!"

"Yes," said Bob. "I'm sorry. I'm the whipper-snapper."

Coming around the bend, they caught sight of the Bascom forest, dark green, hoary, primeval, standing out in colossal proportion against the slashed landscape. Bob took a deep breath when he saw the trees; they were as they had been; here was the picture that he had kept from childhood—part of it. The horses were trotting now, and the buckboard was rocking; as they reached the gates Bob bounced to the ground. The big guide cut had been driven into the side of the tree. On the other side of the staging two sawyers were resting from the last strokes, while the head sawyer with lusty swings sledged in the last wedges. The tree-top was quivering under each impact and the huge trunk was giving forth the creaking pops that warn of a sequoia death. The sight maddened Bob.

"Here, you!" he shouted. "Get off that staging!"

The man who was driving the wedges lowered his sledge and looked around. For a moment he regarded Bob out of his honest blue eyes.

"Hello, Bub," he said at length. "What did I hear you say?"

"I said get off that staging!"

"And who be you?"

"My name is Kenton—Robert Kenton," Bob told him.

"The devil it is! Thought mebbe you was the prophet Joshua! Well, Bub," said the man, "if you feel that way, they is only one thing to do—come up and throw me off!"

Bob climbed the staging. When he got to his feet, the man had laid aside his sledge. Here was a man who would fight; Bob knew the kind.

"JUST a minute," said the man. "You say your name's Kenton? Any relation to old Horatio? 'Cause if there is, they's going to be a hell of a fight."

"I'm Horatio's son." Bob took off his coat.

"The devil! And you want me off this staging. What's the idea?"

"The idea is this. There's not going to be one of these trees scratched with an ax! And I don't care who they belong to!"

The man opened his eyes. "And you're a Kenton! That's a funny way for a Kenton to talk. Did you look at these mountains round about?"

"I did," said Bob. "And these trees stand! That's why you are going to get off. Come!" He took a step forward; the man drew back.

"Hold on, Bub," he said suddenly. "I'll fight anybody, any old time; but I'll not fight for a bad cause. Did I hear you right? You want to save these trees?"

"Exactly."

"Then there'll be no fight. You don't think one-tenth as much of these trees as I do. I been feeling like fighting for a month—like fighting the man who ordered them down. Bub, the day is yours."

The man leaped down; in a moment he had called off his crew. "This will be good news to Uncle Jim," he said. "Good news! You're a Kenton, Bub, and you can buy them. God knows——"

His speech was interrupted by a girl coming up the path. She held out her hand. Just then the great sequoia gave forth another pop that caused them to withdraw from the range of the guide cut. The girl glanced up at the quivering top; Bob saw the tears in her eyes and guessed at the emotion that she was suppressing. He took her hand and drew her away. Once again the tree spoke with an ominous pop.

"BESS," he said, "I am sorry. I received your letter and I came. I did not know. What does Uncle Jim think? The forest is gone! I feel like a—a whipper-snapper!"

The girl smiled sadly; but through her sadness Bob recognized the child he had played with so long ago.

"You have been listening to Mr. Rollins," she said. "He is always talking that way, because he does not understand. You must not feel badly. Your father was a great man; and he was always our friend. What has happened had to be. We know, because we have lived with the redwoods; and living with the redwoods is living close to God. He has told us. He planted these trees centuries ago against the coming of his children."

"And Uncle Jim? What does he say?"

"Just that. He understands. The redwoods have built up a civilization. That was God's wish. Of course, it was hard to see them go; but one must not be selfish. Only"—there were tears in her eyes—"we could not bear to see this old grove go! Something had to be left. God sent you just in time. Father!" She put her hand on his arm and turned him to the hotel. "Come."

Together they walked down the driveway to the rambling hotel of the Sempervirens, with the monarchs spreading above them and casting a shade that was never-ending. It was like the old, old days; a gray squirrel chunged its call and shook a bushy tail on a limb a hundred feet above him; it had been a long time since Bob had heard the gray squirrels.

When they were inside the hotel, Bess stepped to a door and held her finger to her lips; the word that she spoke was pregnant with caution and hope:

"Grandfather!"

BOB found himself in an old-fashioned room, cool and soft-lighted, suggestive of tragedy. On the bed at the far side, propped among the pillows, his flowing beard vying with their whiteness, was Uncle Jim Bascom, asleep. Silently the girl closed the door. The old man stirred and muttered. It seemed to Bob that he was like a spirit, a personification, a super-druid who had come to give his life for this greatest forest of all and then, like the other druids, to pass away. The poetry of the man's spirit drew Bob to the bedside, where, with Bess, he knelt down. The old man stirred again and opened his eyes. Bob felt Bessie's hand pressing against his own, warning, hopeful. Again Uncle Jim moved and reached out his hand, stroking the hair of his grandchild and reaching out tentatively, until he came to the other. Then he glanced down, and for the first time Bob looked into his eyes, the eyes of Jim Bascom of long ago. The man had gone back, in this last moment, to the days of their childhood; he was smiling; and he spoke.

"Ah!" he said. "It is Bobbie. Bobbie and little Bess. You are come again to the big forest. To-morrow we must hitch up the buckboard, we three, and go down to the long bridge by the alders, through the redwoods that God took a thousand years to grow, to the stream where the trout play among the riffles. God is great and good! He made the redwoods for men, for you and little Bess and for Uncle Jim. A thousand years——"

Bob felt the hand upon his head; through the open windows the breeze drifted in from the Bascom forest, the breath of the redwoods, soft and sweet with the perfume of the centuries; then he felt the fingers tighten and set. Simultaneously, the stillness of the forest was broken by the pop of the wounded tree, followed by the sibilant sweep of its majestic fall and the deafening impact as it crashed to earth. The old hotel rocked with its passage. Then came the echoes rolling back, and the booming of the dirge over the denuded mountains.

THE dirge! It seemed to Bob, at the moment, that the end of all things had come. He had not heard the exclamation behind him nor had he seen a man at the door. Uncle Jim was lying still, his withered hand as white as the coverlet upon which it rested. On the other side of the bed was Bessie Bascom, weeping softly. Bob had never seen any one quite so beautiful. The man at the door was standing solemnly, his hat in his hand; he spoke again, very quietly, and motioned to the kneeling youth. Bob stood up. The man took him by the hand and led him through the door.

"Am I too late?" asked the man.

"I do not know." Bob looked up. The stranger was a city man, a business man; his clear-cut face and trim attire were proof of that. "I do not know. Who are you?"

Out of clear blue eyes the man looked at Bob.

"I am Seeley, of the Kenton Lumber Company," said he. "And you are Robert Kenton?"

"Yes," answered Bob, wondering. "But how did you know? I did not send for you."

"Perhaps I guessed it," said the man, "We have been trying to purchase the Bascom forest for a long time, Mr. Kenton. It was your father's wish. He loved Uncle Jim Bascom. When he died he put aside, with the company, a certain sum for the protection of these trees. But the scalawags had managed to gain control of them, and we could not pry them loose—until a few hours ago."

"Then you have bought them?" asked Bob.

The man held out his hand; there was a tear in his eye.

"Here are the papers," he said simply. "Give them to Uncle Jim."

Bob returned to the room. He took the withered hand and thrust the papers among the bent fingers. Then very softly he explained what they were and what had happened. And in the presence of that great calm face it seemed to him, more than ever, that he was talking to God. The light in Uncle Jim's eyes was the light of long ago: it played on Bob and filled him with the feeling of greater things. Bob had the feeling of talking to one who had been on a long journey. Uncle Jim had come back; but he was not listening. He seemed to know it already. He put his hands on the heads of the boy and the girl.

"Listen," he said, and his voice rang with the old freedom. "That was Big Aleck. Big Aleck has fallen. Hasn't he?"

"Yes," said Bob sadly, "that was Big Aleck. They had the tree ready to fall when I came in."

On the other side Bessie was looking up out of wondering eyes.

"Big Aleck. Ah, yes, that is so." The old man straightened. "But you must not be sorry. I had saved the big tree for you and little Bessie. God cut it down against your coming. God is great and good. God does not fail. He knows. I was on my way to Him; but He sent me back—back to you and little Bessie. Out of that tree you shall build a mansion such as the mountains never knew. And——"

He was interrupted by a stifled exclamation from the side of the bed. Bessie was looking up; her face was red; but her eyes were full of happiness.

"Father, father!" she was saying. "No, no. That was a long time ago. We—" She dropped her face to the coverlet.

For a moment the old man looked down at the girl. Bob felt his hand upon his head. It was like a communion, a bond that he could not sunder. He heard the voice speaking like a benediction:

"I know, child. I know. It is an old man's whim; but it is God's wish. It has been a long, long time as you say. The rest must be left to you and Bobbie. But I can wait. I have still something to live for."

A Craig Kennedy Story

The Jazz Addict

The Trau of a Theft at a Brilliant Debut Leads to a Dope Ring, and the Scientific Detective Arrives in Time to Halt a Murder

By Arthur B. Reeve

Illustration by Harold Anderson

"MY PEARLS were dying, Evangeline. You have restored life to them. They were the first gift of your father to me after we were married and I can think of no one he would rather have wear them than you, dear. They are yours. May they bring you happiness!"

Mrs. Vance had taken the famous pearls from the plush case and held them by the clasp ends. They made a half circle of pink and white luster. The girl leaned forward and about the slim white throat her mother clasped them, then took the beautiful face in her hands and kissed her forehead.

Kennedy had been busy on one of his interminable investigations in the laboratory and I had agreed with young Cornelius Cadwalader, who had incorporated himself into a newspaper feature syndicate bearing his famous old name, to accompany him and write a story on "The Dance of the Dying Pearls."

The perfectly matched pearls in the well-known old Vance necklace had been "dying," losing their luster. Vangie Vance had worn them, had revivified them, and her mother had promised them to her on this night of her eighteenth birthday at a dance which was also Vangie's coming out. Cornelius and I had agreed it was a great newspaper story—the girl, the pearls, the dance in the bungalow roof garden on the Vance Building, a fifteen-story office structure reared on the Fifth Avenue site of the old Vance mansion, atop of which the Vances had built a bungalow, sunken garden, pool, a little bit of country high in the air on the busiest, most fashionable street of the city.

Vangie Vance was a beauty. Her chief charm was easy good manners—that quality of doing the right thing at the right moment, without appreciable effort. Vangie was gloriously slim, graceful, and her gown was white and simple. Here was a girl, I felt sure, who, whatever she might say, really lacked the complexes and inhibitions of the half-baked flapper—with one exception. She was dance-crazy.

I made mental note of the picture. Gay gowns, rippling murmurs of laughter, and the catchy strains of the dance orchestra were enchanting—a perfect background for Vangie.

The fairy-like scene was enthralling. Rows of electric wires with many-colored bulbs made starlike points of light that illumined the white stucco of the low, one-story bungalow with its climbing roses and vines, its broad verandas hospitably furnished, the tennis court, swimming pool, and, most of all, the sunken garden, white pergolas and huge groups of evergreen shrubbery.

Hovering about Vangie, young David Drange never left her for long. He seemed to envy every dance, every look, every minute bestowed on any man except himself. It was impossible for Vangie on this occasion, of all, to be with him much. But he seemed to expect it, resented her interest in other fellows. He was inclined to sulk and that seemed to amuse the others.

David was a tall, attractive chap. Had he not been in the tentacles of a green-eyed monster, his smile and naturally genial disposition would have brought him temporary compensation. As it was, I fancied that from him I might get the "low-down" for my story.

It did not take long to discover that he was insanely jealous of Christopher Venable. "He is the cheapest guy on earth!" glared David at my leading question. "At college we used to call him 'Aristo' Venable. He's rushing Vangie—and I don't like it." Drange pushed his hands down into his pockets, slouched gracefully as only a boy of his build can, then suddenly shot an apologetic smile at me. "I suppose you think I'm a boob. But I can't help it. I feel so darned happy when I am dancing with Vangie—well, you know what it is—you don't want any other fellow to have that feeling with the girl you really want. He's not good enough for her. I could run him off the roof!"

"Aristo" Venable had an attractive, ingratiating way with him, too. Plainly Vangie liked him. Most of the young people were dancing when Venable and Vangie swung past.

"Oh, Venable! Let me cut in on this one."

"No splits to-night, Drange. I finish every one I start."

"But, Vangie—do you give him that privilege?"

"Cheerio, Davy! You had one dance and the next fox trot on my list is yours." Vangie wafted him a smile around Venable's shoulder as they floated away.

Drange stared after them.

"THINKS he's another Valentino!" he muttered to me. "Has the picture bug. . . . Well, he has to show me!"

"Is he in a picture?" I prompted.

"Oh, yes, a small part, for fun, like a lot of others in our set. He has these blonde picture queens on his mind too much to make good, though. Ever hear of Daisy Dimples?" David looked curiously at me.

"The serial queen? The one who flirts with death in every episode? Yes. I've often wondered how she does it."

"I've often wondered that, too. . . . Well, Venable knows her. He's been threatened by her fellow, Jim Canavan, the ex-pug who plays emissary of the villain in the same serial with her—that thing the Colossus Films are making. Venable's going to get thrashed within an inch of his life some of these days. And there are others, too," he wound up cryptically.

"Threatened? Why?"

"The pug is jealous, of course. Canavan sees Daisy falling for this society chap and it makes him sore. He manages Canavan's, a dance joint in the Village. A lot of us go there once in a while. It makes Canavan see red, Venable with his 'twist and twirl'—that's the way he talks, you know, out of the side of his mouth."

I saw no more of Davy Drange. Mrs. Vance wanted me to meet a mighty clever little girl who was ambitious to write "society" stories. I was endeavoring to be more kindly than harsh in my discouragement when a man's voice came over my shoulder.

"I haven't had the pleasure of meeting you yet, Mr. Jameson, but I have enjoyed those articles, 'Tolerating Tolerance,' you're writing for Cadwalader's syndicate in the *Star*."

I recognized Wesley Brown. He was a self-made man. His boyhood had been spent struggling for an education. By sheer pluck and courage he had won an enviable position among attorneys and was now breaking into politics. In fact the thing he liked to hear most was that he "had the makings of another Lincoln." He was a friend of the people from whom he had risen, yet counsel for many of the wealthy and nearly wealthy—for the Vance estate, among others. Wesley Brown was tall, plain of face, almost homely, and plainly attired. Nearly everybody respected him, even in this set. He had looked in at the dance, seemed to know everybody.

"Well, Norma," he remarked to the little girl with me, "I was just going when I saw you with Mr. Jameson. Don't dance too late."

She waved a saucy farewell as he departed down the steps to the private lift.

Then to me: "Goodness! You have to pay to be great! Think of leaving a party like this at this time. What time is it?"

I looked at my watch. "About half past ten."

"Hardly started. At a party like this," she rattled on, "I never leave until three, anyway." She looked up at me with enthusiasm ill concealed under the assumed ennui of thirty.

AT MIDNIGHT a huge bell tolled twelve, booming from the center of the pool on which a mausoleum, painted to resemble marble, had been built on a small barge. As the bell tolled the barge pulled by unseen wires began to move slowly over toward a flower-bordered edge. A spotlight focused on the barge.

There was no need to round up the guests. They crowded toward the broad edge of the pool. Slowly on one circuit after another the lights went out. It was dark, the more intense by contrast with the previous illumination.

The door of the mausoleum opened slowly. A specter stepped out in most dignified manner. I looked to see what made it so deathlike. The specter wore black tights. Painted on them with radium paint, the bones of the body glowed brilliantly in the darkness.

There was laughter, just a bit subdued, with a tinge of creepiness in it as the guests were directed to pass before the specter and receive long, flowing ghost gowns of white crape paper with hoods. Next on the program was to be a ghost dance—done in the darkness—with an accompaniment of drums.

"It won't be long!" I smiled to Norma. But I saw no response. In fact there was a weirdness as we obeyed the commands of the hollow-voiced specter. At least the ghosts themselves were lively and laughing soon, as with robes and hoods thrown over them they scattered, waiting for the drums.

There was a long beat, to assemble on the lawn. It was all in fun, yet I fancied there might have been just a touch of clamminess under ghostly robes to some otherwise warm hands.

Quickly one of the figures moved forward and seized another.

"Help! Help!"

There was another, inarticulate, suppressed cry of fear. No one moved. Probably that was part of the game.

"The pearls!"

Vangie had fallen in a heap on the lawn.

The crowd was now aroused. Some fellows started to close in on the figure backing away in the darkness.

"Everybody stand just where you are—or I'll shoot!"

It was a clear, bell-like voice of command, the voice of a woman, too. Nervously now, they looked.

"Is it part of the party to scare the life out of us?" I heard little Norma nervously now. "I'm going to see. I'll have a light. . . . The switch is over there!"

"Stop!"

A shot rang out and the glass gazing ball near which Norma had been standing was shattered.

Naturally, no one at the party was armed. We were at the mercy of these two, the man and the girl in the robes and hoods. Skilfully, coolly, the girl with the gun covered the get-away of the man with the stolen pearls as he backed toward the steps down to the lift.

On the lawn now Vangie was trying to rise, pointing desperately. "It's real—I tell you! They have my pearls!" As she half rose she tore the paper robe, revealing a bare white neck.

DOWN the broad marble staircase to the fifteenth floor the two ghostly intruders disappeared, locking the door.

A moment and there was a rush, some to the door, some to Vangie, others for lights.

I made for the door. By one of Craig's devices I soon had it open. On the fifteenth floor we could hear the elevator, a private automatic lift, descending. Instantly I turned to the house telephone and called the first floor. Tim, the doorman, answered.

"There's been a hold-up—the pearls. . . . The thieves are coming down the private lift. Be ready. . . . Get them!"

"The bloody burglars . . . Yes, sir. . . . Here it comes!"

There was silence as I held the line.

"You must be mistaken, sir! There's no one in the lift!"

"No, not mistaken. Lock the street doors. Let no one pass. Watch out for a man and a girl."

If they had not gone down in the elevator, they must have taken to the stairs. Down I rushed, followed by several others. But on each of the fourteen floors we searched hastily, finding nothing.

"Stand!" This was at the first floor. "Where's your partner?" It was the doorman.

"Oh, I'm Jameson, Tim, who just phoned to you. No one has gone out? Well, keep guard while I telephone."

I called Deputy O'Connor; then I called Craig. "We searched the bungalow and top floor," I told him hastily, "are holding all the guests, came down through the building, found no one. Here's one thing, though. The doorman tells me there's not an opening in this elevator shaft from the top floor to the ground—a private lift in a private shaft. . . . And the car arrived at the ground floor—empty!"

"I'll be there right away," answered Craig simply, hanging up.

It was only a few moments after the police that Kennedy arrived. Already they had started a methodical search of the building from the ground up, posting a guard about it.

Craig went directly upstairs in the private lift, slowly, assuring himself that there was indeed no exit from the shaft to any floor until we reached the fifteenth.

Up the broad flight of marble stairs with hand-wrought iron railings we mounted to the roof. All about were the young folks, scared and vexed at the dramatic and sudden end of the dance. Kennedy smiled at the ghostlike couples as I caught sight of Vangie and Mrs. Vance.

"LET them tell you, first-hand, Craig," I suggested as I introduced him.

"Yes, Mr. Kennedy!" cried Vangie scarcely waiting. "They've stolen my necklace—and spoiled my party!"

Mrs. Vance, visibly perturbed, took the loss more calmly, however. She seemed reassured by the arrival of Craig. Over and over she insisted that she suspected none of the servants.

"It all happened so suddenly I'm shaking yet," broke in Vangie. "I tried to have my party different. It surely was."

Kennedy nodded reassuringly to Vangie, then turned to me. "The police have started from the bottom up. I shall start from the top down."

Searching for hiding places in an office building when you have a pass key is not so difficult as it is time-consuming. We had gone down four floors without discovering anything when Craig, instead of taking the next flight that wound about the public elevator shaft, turned out under a glowing red fire-exit light to the fireproof stairs outside. On the outside balcony he flashed his electric bull's-eye over on the roof of the ten-story Union Pipe and Tank Building next door.

There, on that roof, was a wide plank long enough to reach across the twelve-foot gap over the sheer shaft to the ground.

Kennedy regarded the plank only a moment. "Down the fireway stairs, crossed to that roof, down that building with an entrance around the corner!" he exclaimed. "The descending lift was just a blind to gain time by diverting you."

VANGIE, who had followed us, more and more nervous under the tension, was crying. I tried to comfort her, assure her that Kennedy and the police between them would undoubtedly recover the pearls. It did not seem to quiet her even when I learned that the pearls had been insured.

"That's not over the pearls," whispered Kennedy, aside, a few moments later.

"What then?"

"She knows something—or fears it."

"But what?"

"We shall have to wait to find out that. . . . It will come out. . . . Only wait."

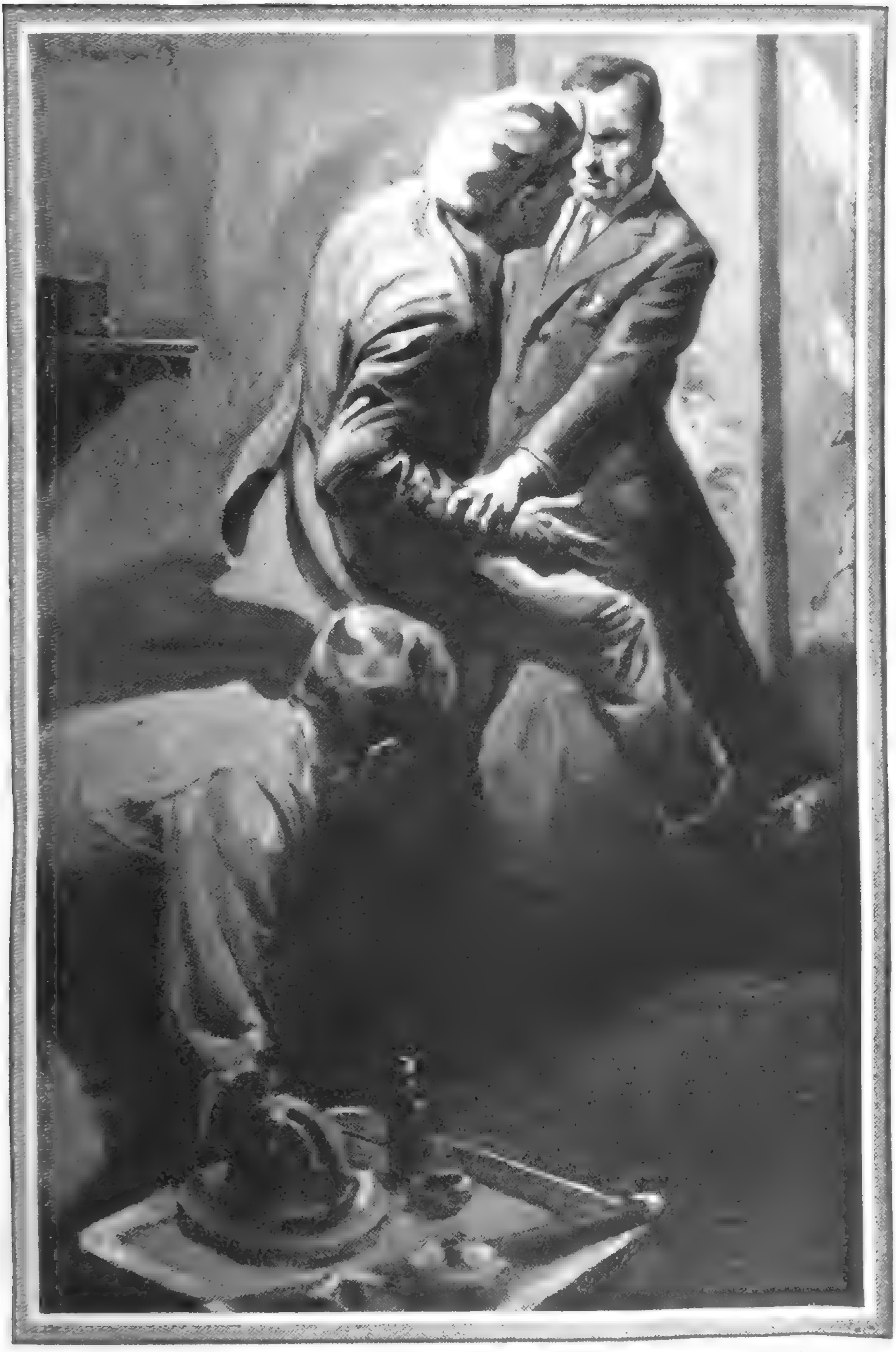
It was in the forenoon of the next day that Kennedy opened the laboratory door to Vangie, Venable and an older woman. The older woman stood for a moment in tremulous indecision.

"Mr. Kennedy?" she inquired at length. Craig bowed. "I am Mrs. Drange. I want your advice. Vangie has insisted on my coming to you first. And I want you to hear Christopher's story, too." She stopped, then in a choking whisper added, "David has—disappeared!"

Vangie had her arm about David's mother, looking at Craig. "Never mind the pearls," she entreated. "Find David first!"

"David—disappeared?" repeated Kennedy. "When did you see him last?"

"I saw him last at the dance, about eleven," explained Vangie. "But Chris saw him later. Tell what you know, Chris."



The Marquis of Queensberry never contemplated bouts in a dope joint. . . . "Get to that iron door. Keep it open!" panted Kennedy.

VENABLE shifted his eyes from Craig's face, although he talked to him. He seemed uneasy, kept pushing his hands through a pompadour that needed no further dressing. There was something, I couldn't tell just what, that made me dislike the young man, a feeling of distrust that grew as he unfolded his story.

"Well, you see, Norine Nash, Dave and I cut the dance for a while to go down to Canavan's in the Village where they were having a Marathon. I know that's against the law. It seems we let ourselves in for a mix-up. We hadn't been there a quarter of an hour when some one shouted, 'The cops!' There was a scramble. Mixing it in the fight was the last I saw of Dave or Norine. I thought they knew the passage through the back yard, that they were following me." He ran his fingers again through his hair. "It seems they didn't."

Briefly, Venable had made a get-away, supposed David had, too, with Norine. Norine had been arrested by the police, carted off with some other girls and fellows, finally found herself in the Night Court for women. It was thus that the story had come out. Norine had been rescued from the court by her family, a very chastened young lady. She had sent word to Wesley Brown, attorney for the family. Brown had got in about eleven, had gone to bed, but his Jap servant answered the call, waked him, and Brown had her out before morning. In fact it had been easy for Brown, for in his police-court days he had once been the attorney for Jim Canavan when he was a "pug" and got into gunman scrapes.

"But what could have become of David?" asked Kennedy.

"Tell him the reason Dave went with you, Chris," interrupted Vangie. "Dave wouldn't have left my party for any old Marathon." She said it confidently. Mrs. Drange was keeping back the anxious tears.

Venable shifted restlessly, then turned to me. "Ever hear of the Jazz Gyppers?"

"Only in the police news—a busy little bunch of blackmailers, are they not?"

He nodded. "Norine was in bad with them—er—they knew something—er—nothing in itself, you understand, but it looked bad. They'd been threatening to tell Norine's folks. They started on her and she paid 'em her allowance several times to shut them up before she sailed abroad. When she came back, they tackled her again, the day before Vangie's dance. It was more than she could pay. I didn't have it to help her out, either. So we went to Dave. Dave said not to pay, to tell them where to go. He said the way to handle blackmailers was to call them, get the jump on them; if we didn't shut it up now it would get more and worse. There was only one way to handle a bunch like that—tell them where they got off. Norine was crying and Dave said he'd do it, he'd fix these Gyppers."

"Wasn't that just like Dave?" put in Vangie. "He made himself a—a Don Quixote for us!"

"Then you think that David may have been beaten up by these Jazz Gyppers, in the raid, for defying them?" asked Craig.

Venable nodded.

KENNEDY turned suddenly toward Vangie. "What did you mean just now by 'made himself a Don Quixote—for us'? What's the scandal?"

Vangie did not hesitate. She glanced at Venable, then answered Craig frankly. "I may as well make a clean sweep of it. It will all come out now, anyhow. You see, one afternoon last spring just for a lark a lot of us went out on Canavan's boat to Rum Row to bring in fifty cases of stuff from the three-mile limit. There were six of us: Jim Canavan and Daisy Dimples—you know the picture actress—Norine and Chris, Dave and I.

"Well, we got out there all right, got the stuff off a terrible-looking schooner. But just then one of the revenue boats was between us and the shore. So we went to sea, hoping to zigzag our way in after dark without getting picked up. We got in, all right, safe, with the stuff. But we were out all night on this cabin cruiser. There wasn't anything really wrong—but I suppose it was scandalous. We alibied ourselves with our folks and got away with it. That's what really happened. But then these Gyppers began to threaten to tell a lot of things that didn't really happen. They began on Norine. Norine was frightened. Her folks are pretty strict. She paid, like a little fool. I thought it was only a question of time when they'd try to shake down the rest of us. And it was. So there; now you know the dirt! When Dave heard they were going to start on me next if Norine didn't come across, he got wild, went down to clean them out."

Kennedy shook his head thoughtfully at this new instance of miscarriage of what should have protected young people. But he did not stop to improve the occasion to read a lecture. The event had been lecture enough on law violation. He turned to the telephone and soon had the Bureau of Missing Persons at work.

Craig seemed to inspire confidence in Mrs. Drange. But Vangie seemed unable to curb her impatience.

"May I help?" she asked.

Kennedy smiled. "If you will take my advice, you will both keep as quiet as possible. Above all things, don't go down to Canavan's. There's danger in it for you. They know you too well."

I knew Craig himself wanted to start on Canavan's. But there was no use going there until it opened in the afternoon and we could go under at least some kind of cover. Besides, he had laid out an investigation of his own.

I had already written my first story of the robbery for the *Star* and I spent the afternoon keeping in touch with the men on the case and the news associations, hoping to pick up some news of Drange.

It was about five o'clock when we got to Canavan's in the Village. Having no girls with us, we had to assume the rôle of rounders looking for excitement.

Decoratively I was disappointed at Canavan's. I wondered why these youngsters of the rich found a craze for it with its general mussiness. Perhaps that was the very reason. At any rate, it had one requisite, a splendid little dance floor. Around were tables and in the rear three or four smaller rooms. There were several couples dancing. They looked like curiosity seekers.

We had been there only long enough to establish confidence in the waiter when I heard a voice at the door.

"Where's Jim? Is Jim here?"

A girl had entered, was speaking to the head waiter. I recognized Daisy Dimples.

DAISY was a round-faced beauty, with low broad forehead, a little straight nose, full, bow-shaped lips. Her eyes were large and dark, shaded with long silken lashes. Little curls peeping out from under her snug-fitting street hat were golden and softened her face, which seemed, as I glanced a second time, strained and harassed.

The waiter jerked his thumb toward one of the smaller rooms in the rear.

But her voice had evidently carried. A fellow appeared in the doorway. I knew it was Canavan. It must be. That concave face, with broad nose and full, hairy nostrils could have belonged only to an ex-pugilist. To make his face even more repulsive his nose must have been broken in some ring encounter and knitted unevenly. Besides, he had a cauliflower ear. I could well imagine him as the titular head of the "Gyppers."

He did not come forward. He leaned against the door and waited for Daisy to come to him. As she crossed the floor he watched her with eyes speculative and scheming. He made me think of a hairy ape.

"Well?" he muttered in a gruff growl.

"Where's Dopey Sniffen?"

"You know! Ten days on the Island!"

"But, Jim!" There was a whispered word or two, then I caught the word, "Please!"

As I watched I could not help thinking there was something peculiar about Daisy which even the make-up could not conceal. The muscles of her face twitched. Her lips trembled. Her eyes were watery. I caught Craig watching her fascinated. What did he see?

Canavan nodded sourly toward another back room. She opened the door. It seemed to lead to a kitchen.

A moment later she returned. One moment she had been horribly upset. Now she came back a different girl—eyes bright, alert and animated.

"Feel any better?"

"Yes!" She whispered again.

"Say! How do I know where he is?"

Somehow I felt sure she had been talking about David Drange now. In a moment I knew it.

"Is that what's the matter with you?" he laughed.

"But what happened to him, Jim? I just heard of it."

Canavan scowled. "Shut up. I don't know where he is." Then he leaned over toward her darkly. "Say! You got no

Everybody's Magazine, January, 1924

show there. Stick to your old friends, understand? Jim Canavan'll take care of you. Haven't I just shown it? That Vance flapper's the kid with Drange. You're not in it." He laid his hand on her arm.

She tossed her head. "What do you know about it?"

"I have to know what these guys are up to, don't I? That Venable was only playing around with you. You know it."

"Of all the nerve! Venable was playing around with me—Davy Drange don't care a whoop about me, eh? I won't stand it! It's all that Vangie Vance. I hate her! I'm going to put her out, too!" The movie serial queen paused and drew herself up. "Look at me. What's wrong with me? Ain't I pretty enough?" She stamped her foot.

Canavan smiled cynically. He might have felt it, but he wouldn't admit it. "Then I s'pose when you want some more of the stuff you'll be back to see Jim again—huh?"

She had turned toward the door.

"Working to-night?"

"Just finishing some retakes on the last episode, getting ready for the next. Some tests, too. Now, Jim," she weakened, "don't get sore at me." She smiled. "You know I was a bunch of nerves when I came in."

He grunted as she smiled her way out.

Underneath, now, I saw there was more or less open conflict between Daisy and Vangie over David. Once Canavan had been Daisy's ideal. But that must have been before she met Chris Venable. The smattering of education in pictures had made her rather admire a fellow who seemed to have a certain polish. Then she had met David. David, to her, was a "regular guy." I saw Daisy's infatuation for him. Only Vangie Vance seemed to monopolize David. Hence, in a nature like Daisy's, jealousy and hate. I wondered. What might that arouse in a nature like Canavan's?

Next to this conflict of Daisy and Vangie, one thing seemed to stand out in Kennedy's mind as we left Canavan's—the appearance of Daisy as she entered the place and as she was a few minutes later.

"It isn't the forbidden dancing, nor even the illicit sale of bootleg that's the hell-gripping thing there," remarked Kennedy. "That's a depot for the dope peddler, one of the many little nests of addicts all over the city, young addicts who are looking for a new thrill. That's a line on it I can get from O'Connor's Narcotic Division."

On the way Kennedy stopped at the laboratory. Waiting for him there was a message from Vangie.

"WHAT a girl!" exclaimed Craig, vexed. "There, Walter. Read that. She has done the very thing I told her not to do—but has found out something I haven't, yet. I hope she is home now."

I read:

MR. KENNEDY:

I have been working all afternoon to find David. I have found no direct clue but I have found that Daisy Dimples is a drug addict. She gets her dope often from the flat over the old saloon a block north from the Colossus studio. A lot of the girls and fellows in the Gypper gang are dopes.

Do you suppose they did him up and have taken him to that place or some place like it? Is there any way for you to find out? The password is, "It's all over."

Hastily,

VANGIE VANCE.

Evidently in Vangie's mind there had been only one idea: Where was David Drange? She had gone to work on her own with the confidence of her generation. And she had discovered something, too. But how? Where was she?

Kennedy called her home. The butler did not know; no one knew, and they were worried.

We went on down to Deputy O'Connor at headquarters.

O'Connor shook his head. He was forced to confess to Kennedy that the police had not a clue to the pearls, yet. They had learned nothing through any of the "fences"; there was not a trace reported from any pawnshop; not a hint had come from Maiden Lane or from any jeweler, either in the city or in neighboring cities.

O'Connor leaned back, regarding Craig speculatively. "There are two things that run through my mind," he remarked, narrowing the crow's-feet of his eyes. "Are those pearls hidden somewhere? Or are they going to be secretly smuggled out of the country, abroad where it won't be so dangerous?"

Kennedy smiled quietly. "There's

nothing to prevent both those things from being true."

With a frown O'Connor turned over the afternoon papers. They had taken up the case, with a great deal of unwarranted criticism of the police. And of course the loss of the pearls and the disappearance of Drange were featured together. O'Connor had been reading one of the staff writers on the *Record* who called it "The Mystery of the Marathon":

> Hidden away in this dance hall was being conducted one of the prohibited Marathon dance contests. This raid was a part of the "clean-up" of the Village. Why stop there?
>
> The truth is, the speak-easy has bred the dance-easy. No sooner is a thing prohibited, verboten, than it is the one thing every one wants to do. It becomes fashionable. Youth is attracted by the mere fact that something has become at once risky and risqué.

O'Connor flung the paper down in disgust. "What's the matter these days? The young folks are going to the dogs!"

"No." Kennedy shook his head. "With all the jazz mania, one-piece bathing suits, frank talk of sex, and the other things they criticize the flapper and the cake-eater for, they are no worse than the young folks of the past—in fact are not so bad. They're really better for the frankness in facing the facts of life. The vice of the past was never in the open. Underneath, young people are really conservative. Human nature is incurably striving for better things. Now, I shall need the help of your Narcotic Division. Can you assign some one to me?"

O'Connor nodded good-naturedly. "I'll assign the chief—Dr. Peters!"

"Yes," nodded Dr. Peters as Kennedy laid before him what we had discovered, "I suppose New York comes close to being the clearing-house of the illicit drug trade of the country. The supply is almost unlimited; nearly every ship that enters the harbor brings some of it. I know that place of Canavan's in the Village. We've had it under observation. One of my best stool pigeons, Jasper, an ex-addict, has been gathering evidence on it."

"May I have him to-night?" asked Craig.

The doctor summoned Jasper, a pasty-faced young man. The joint near the studio was new to Jasper. At least he said it was, although I don't always place entire confidence in these ex-addicts.

"And may I ask you, doctor, to hold yourself in readiness in case I need you? There's a peddler of the stuff, Dopey Sniffen, on the Island. . . ." Kennedy whispered aside a minute. Neither Jasper nor I could hear. Dr. Peters nodded.

Following Vangie's clue we found the saloon apartment, one of those nondescript places that might house anything. Criminals in the dope game are usually desperate. In plain words I was afraid.

It was a vicious old character who opened the door, a man with a long filthy beard, and high receding forehead that accentuated his extreme baldness. I wondered whether the palsy from which he suffered was really a blind for serpentine strength in those long grimy fingers.

"It's all over!" We let Jasper do the talking at first.

The man's eyes glinted evilly as he saw a large roll of bills in Craig's hand. "Dimples sent us." The man chuckled, showing teeth yellow and fanglike.

Another chuckle and the wretch shuffled off, beckoning us to follow. Jasper was like a passport. Back of Craig I watched behind me, expecting to be collared or choked any moment. There was a queer, nauseating odor in the narrow passageway that almost made me dizzy. It was dark until we came to a door. Beyond that was a sheet metal door that slid in grooves. I could see the grimy fingers fumbling in the darkness as a signal was given and the door slid open.

A STEEP flight of steps and we found that we were down in the back of the cellar. Here was a very Oriental octagonal room with Persian rugs, walls draped with vividly embroidered Asiatic silks, small tables, on one of which was an opium layout, on the ceiling a fresco of groups of languorous lovers.

About six of the eight sides were odd-shaped little rooms partitioned off by nothing heavier than plaster-board. You could hear through them. I looked in one, then across at another. Pinched wan faces on the divans, haggard eyes, for the most part dull and lusterless, sometimes, perhaps, shining like the old man's with unnatural brilliancy in the darkened sockets, nervous, twitching facial muscles, needle-punctured, shrunken arms, hopeless, disillusioned disappointment.

"She beat us to it." Craig was a few feet in front of us. I started when I saw Daisy Dimples in another of the little divan rooms, almost dead to the world. Lying there, she seemed too beautiful a girl to be an habitué of that cellar of sin. She seemed to be more restless than the others.

"Got any H?" the addict asked.

Kennedy had given the cue to Jasper to get heroin. The old man shook a palsied assent and shuffled off. Kennedy moved over on the thick rug and quietly we took possession of the cubby-hole next to Daisy's. The heroin was produced, paid for, and we went through the motions of sniffing it. Jasper showed us how to fake it.

Daisy was muttering, rambling under her latest shot of the drug. We listened intently, trying to catch it.

"Yes—yes—I'll do it—but I don't want to—if you give me all the decks I want—all I want. . . ."

I could scarcely breathe in my eagerness to miss nothing.

"Vangie—always Vangie. . . . I'm sick of Vangie—those pearls. . . ."

"Say, kid, can that stuff!"

Another voice that sounded familiar had interrupted Daisy's raving through the partition.

"Where is she?"

I started; it was Jim Canavan's voice.

"Down in the studio. . . . I heard that she went to Wesley Brown for help to find Dave, that he warned her to keep away from your place. . . . She came in—to the casting director—hung around. . . . They decided to give her a try-out. . . ." Daisy laughed, reviving at the thought.

I saw it. Vangie had gone directly from Kennedy, in her anxiety, to Wesley Brown to get him also to help in finding David. Brown had tried unsuccessfully, as Craig had done, to warn her to keep out of it, to avoid danger from the Gyppers.

Like many another girl, Vangie was movie-struck, too. She had gone to the Colossus studio for a job—really to play amateur detective.

"It was easy, Jim. . . . She fell for the picture game like a boob. . . . Oh, Jim! Tell me—where is Dave?"

"Shut up! How do I know? Ain't you going back to work? I got a little job on tonight, with the boat."

"No. . . . I don't want to work. . . . I don't want to go on the boat, either. . . . Work? Daisy and Vangie can't work in the same studio! They're casting for the new episode, 'The Gilded Girl,' getting some one to double for me. I won't do it. I lent them my maid—and another maid . . ."

"WALTER," whispered Kennedy, "I've had enough. Are you ready to go? There's some danger to Vangie!"

We passed out into the main octagonal room. But it was impossible for three of us to do that quietly and without being seen.

"Hello!"

Jim Canavan had caught sight of us. Jasper was leading. He poked his ape-head out into the half-light.

"Well, I'll be—— That's Jasper, that damned dirty stool pigeon for the police—and you two—I saw you down at the place this afternoon. . . . What do you want? Are you squealers for the bulls, too? Well, you won't squeal this!"

Canavan bounded over with all that remained of his agility of the prize ring, and that was considerable yet. I closed in to help Kennedy. Jasper was no help to anybody. It was only a moment when I felt myself spinning among the layout, the teakwood table and a divan by it. I picked myself up to return to an attack in the rear. There are no rules in a fight like this. The Marquis of Queensberry never contemplated bouts in the dark of a dope joint.

I narrowly missed an encounter with Canavan again. But this time it was slightly different. Kennedy was flinging him with all the art and gusto of jiu jitsu acquired on one of our recent Japanese cases. I had to dodge Canavan's feet to save my own head.

"Get to that iron door, Jasper. Keep it open!" panted Kennedy. He dragged Canavan to his feet before that leather pusher could rise, and as he did so, he jammed his blue-nosed automatic sharply into the man's kidneys. "Now, hands up—and not a move! Walter, get Daisy—make her walk—carry her. . . . Come on!"

As between an old addict and a young ex-addict, Jasper had won over the old man. The door was open.

With his automatic still in the small of Canavan's back while Jasper and I half carried, half shoved the logy Daisy along, we got out on the street. I saw the studio far down the long block. Somehow I felt, in that atmosphere, there was peril to Vangie. I had no idea what to expect. One thing I knew, though. We must hurry.

AN AMBULANCE clanged around the far corner. Craig prodded us along. Suddenly it stopped before the studio.

"Hurry!" he cried again. We broke into a run and reached the studio just as the white-coated ambulance surgeon disappeared in it. In the confusion the door had been left open. We pushed on in.

Everywhere there was excitement. The director scarcely noticed our arrival, nor did any one else pay much attention. The doctor took it for granted. We followed right up to the dressing-rooms.

A pitiful sight greeted us. On the floor, gasping for every breath, eyes popping out of her head, passing from one convulsion into another, was the radiantly beautiful and happy girl of the night before. Only, Vangie was nude and painted from head to foot with gold paint. Over her now a filmy sheet was tangled like a winding sheet.

"My God, what devilment in the name of art and the movies!" exclaimed Craig, aroused at the fiendishness. "Didn't any of you know that that would kill a girl?"

He shoved the gun into my hands to cover Canavan. Daisy was trembling, sank on a settee in the hall with Jasper near her.

Desperately Craig and the doctor worked. "All the banana oil you can get from the paint and carpenter shop," ordered Craig stridently. "Get busy. Don't gape! Every second counts. Turpentine, too, only hurry."

With the doctor he tried to rub the paint off with water. It stuck to the dying girl's skin tenaciously. Alcohol did a little better.

"Who did this?" muttered Kennedy under his breath to the director as they worked.

"Daisy Dimples' maid. She was to be in the dressing-room as soon as the girl returned. She's not here. We didn't suspect any trouble until some one knocked on the door and received no answer—only the sounds of some one suffering. I got the ambulance right away. I knew she could live only twenty minutes comfortably that way. It's been nearly half an hour since we finished shooting the scene."

"Who's responsible for the lack of cold cream under this make-up?" demanded Kennedy. "A hot bath might have fixed things pretty quick if that had been used."

No one answered. Meanwhile, with the banana oil the doctor and a couple of other maids were working desperately to get off the paint. Craig cleared the room of all who had not something to do with saving Vangie.

In the door he caught sight of Daisy Dimples now standing forlornly by a pile of props, her hands before her eyes as if striving to shut out something too awful to see.

"Did you tell your maid to leave off the cream and then beat it?"

Only a nod was Craig's answer at first. "I—I had to," she stammered. "But the thought of it set me crazy. I went to the hop joint to forget. But I didn't think it would kill her—only hurt her."

Kennedy said nothing. He moved quickly over to a telephone in the director's office, called Dr. Peters. Then I heard him trying to get Wesley Brown and Chris Venable.

It was not a quick operation to save Vangie. Her pulse and respiration were better, though she was still unconscious. The paint had been removed and the efforts of the doctor were now showing some results.

"Ever hear of the old medieval pageant in Rome when the page boy was covered with gold leaf?" Kennedy explained to me as we waited. "The boy died before they could get it off. People don't realize how we breathe through our skin, throw off poisons through the pores. Why, when the Indians used to go on the warpath, they painted themselves generously. Sometimes in their ferocity they would paint too much of their skins and die. They knew no better."

"Yes, Miss Vance came to us, said she was willing to play that peril in this episode, double for Daisy who refused to do it. She was just the right build. But I didn't think it would be a real peril. I thought the maids would take care of her."

I wondered as the director explained. All in the company were not Gyppers, at least. What about the maids? From the balcony now I could look down on the set used in the "Gilded Girl" episode, as I thought of poor Vangie smeared with the gold paint, not a pore that was not clogged, sealed. It had been an attack not only on Vangie's youth and beauty but on her life.

"She might have known that they didn't need to gild her for pictures," observed Kennedy beside me. "Gold photographs black. She'd have been as black as the queen of spades on the film. They might as well have used burnt cork."

There was the noise of several people entering. I caught sight of Dr. Peters of the Narcotic Division and with him a shifty-eyed individual who I learned was Dopey Sniffen. But behind the two was David Drange!

I stared. "Well—where have you been?"

David smiled that attractive smile of his. "On the Island."

"The Island? The workhouse?"

He nodded. "I got pinched in that raid, same as Norine. Only in court I refused to give my real name, my address, anything. I had just heard a remark by 'Dopey' Sniffen here about Canavan and a big deal with a man he called the 'Dope King'—fifty-fifty. Canavan was to get half for marketing the stuff this fellow was going to bring in and pay for. I thought if I went along with Dopey when he got over there and the craving came on I could get the rest of the story, get rid of these Gyppers forever. So I went to the workhouse for ten days. Only Mr. Kennedy, not satisfied with the court record, discovered me there. He was good enough to keep quiet, let me stay until I got my story."

Kennedy smiled at Drange. "Only now," he apologized, "I had to hurry things up a bit and call Dr. Peters in. Tell the doctor what you found, David."

"I found a lot. But there's more yet. I don't need to tell Dr. Peters that peddling dope has many ramifications. It's not that in this case, though. It's the root. I mean where the dope comes from."

Dr. Peters smiled encouragingly. "It's certain there's no home-brewing of dope. There may be 'synthetic' dope. But it's manufactured somewhere and the root of this evil, like the root of all evil, is money."

"Yes," David hurried on. "And dope-running is worse than rum-running. There's no bulk to dope. Dope running is big business—quick profits and a percentage that would make Shylock look like a piker. What I was after was to find out who is back of this dope-smuggling, who finances it, who is taking the risk and the rake-off. Whose money is this Dope-King using?"

The dressing-room door opened. Vangie was now lying weak but conscious on a couch with somebody's old kimono loosely over her.

"MAY I see her?" David pleaded with Kennedy. "Say! When I hear of a thing like this, it makes me realize how much I care for that little girl. Please!"

Kennedy smiled into his big brown eyes. "She has asked to see you."

Drange was in the room in a second. He put his arms around Vangie gently. "That fox trot's still mine!" he reminded with a smile. "And there'll be no splits or cuts—all our lives—Vangie." On his knees beside the couch, his dark head close to hers, he was a picture I like to remember. "Tell me, Vangie, why did you come down here?"

She had her hand in his. "I wanted—to find out what the Gyppers knew about you. I decided to play detective, like Mr. Kennedy, find out some things I wanted to know. I was impatient."

"And did you?"

"Yes—I found that the cast is wild over the way things are going. They're not eating regular! Colossus Films has roped in a lot of people's money—and it's as good as lost. The bottom has dropped out. Something had to be done immediately to save it. I knew many of my friends had invested in it—and, oh, Davy, there's more to it, too! . . . I was just getting the story back of it, when——"

She closed her eyes and sank her head in vexation at the defeat and her temporary weakness. It was maddening.

David looked on her with almost worship in his respect. "And I suppose that information that you had, and what you might get, made you dangerous—to some one!"

Kennedy turned to the door. Wesley Brown had come in with Chris Venable. I saw Kennedy eying Venable's face sharply. Nor could I take my eyes off it once my attention was directed to him. There was a terrific change in Venable's usually dapper and debonair manner. I had come to recognize it by this time. It was lack of dope.

"I suppose you're dying for a deck, Venable," shot out Kennedy. "Perhaps Daisy can spare some!"

It took me a moment to wake up to the fact that, after all, Chris Venable was a young and careful addict.

"Daisy," prompted Kennedy, now, feeling about for a way to bring out the truth as he knew it by playing them all one against the other, "you might as well tell all you know. It will go easier with you in the end."

"All I know?" She smiled nervously. "Why, everything was going all right last night. Chris Venable got Dave and Norine down to Canavan's. It would have been all right except for that confounded raid. The robbery of the pearls went off all right—just what we wanted—some one else who had been invited to the party might have been suspected. . . ."

"The pearl robbery?" put in Vangie, rising on her elbow with new strength. "Were you in that?"

Daisy looked hard at Craig. It came as if the words were being wrung from her. "Yes. I was the girl."

With a smile of confidence, Kennedy swung about toward Canavan standing, surly, in front of me. "I suppose you know, Canavan, it's no use. That fifty-fifty deal is all off. Sniffen is here. We know it all. The Dope King has thrown you over. That's all."

"The hell you say!" Canavan looked about defiantly.

Kennedy did not take the bluff. "Yes. You were ready to go out on your boat to-night to get the big haul of the bootleg dope, weren't you? You have a half-interest in it, for peddling the stuff. Isn't that so? You see, I know the whole thing. You'd better come clean. Now, Daisy, why did you do it?"

"Why did I do it?" Daisy stared helplessly. "Why? I was threatened with exposure to the public as an addict. You know what that can do to a picture actress. And then, where else was I going to get my dope?" She was staring wildly now. "But this last Gilded Girl episode—that was too much for me. I may be an addict. But I haven't sunk as low as that!"

Canavan scowled threateningly at her. But Kennedy stepped between them. "Go on," he said in a low voice.

"I went to that hop joint to get hopped up." She was staring helplessly at David and Vangie now. There was no hope there. "Besides, it was my alibi." She raised her voice in desperation. "I can have an alibi as well as any one else—even if I haven't a Jap servant to lie for me!"

"You see, Canavan, the game is up," prodded Kennedy. "Another minute and she'll confess that you did the hold-up with her. Besides, I happen to know that Wesley Brown is counsel for the Union Pipe and Tank——"

"Damn you! You been snitching, you squealer!"

I JAMMED Craig's automatic into Canavan's back until he squirmed as he started to jump forward at Wesley Brown, then fell back with a scowl at me.

"There's half o' them poils in his safe yet. He took 'em in the building where his office is, let us out, quiet. We had a deal with the captain of this here rum-runner who's smuggling in twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of German synthetic dope."

"This is another of your ventures, is it not, Brown—this studio and picture company?"

Wesley Brown was too good an attorney to commit himself. "I decline to answer that——"

Kennedy's eye caught Vangie and David, his arm supporting her, as they bent forward, realizing now what each had found out in the unmasking.

"You were terribly involved with your clients' money in this company, Brown. The trade knows it. I know it. The Vance pearls would save the company, pay the dope runner out there, leave you a handsome profit."

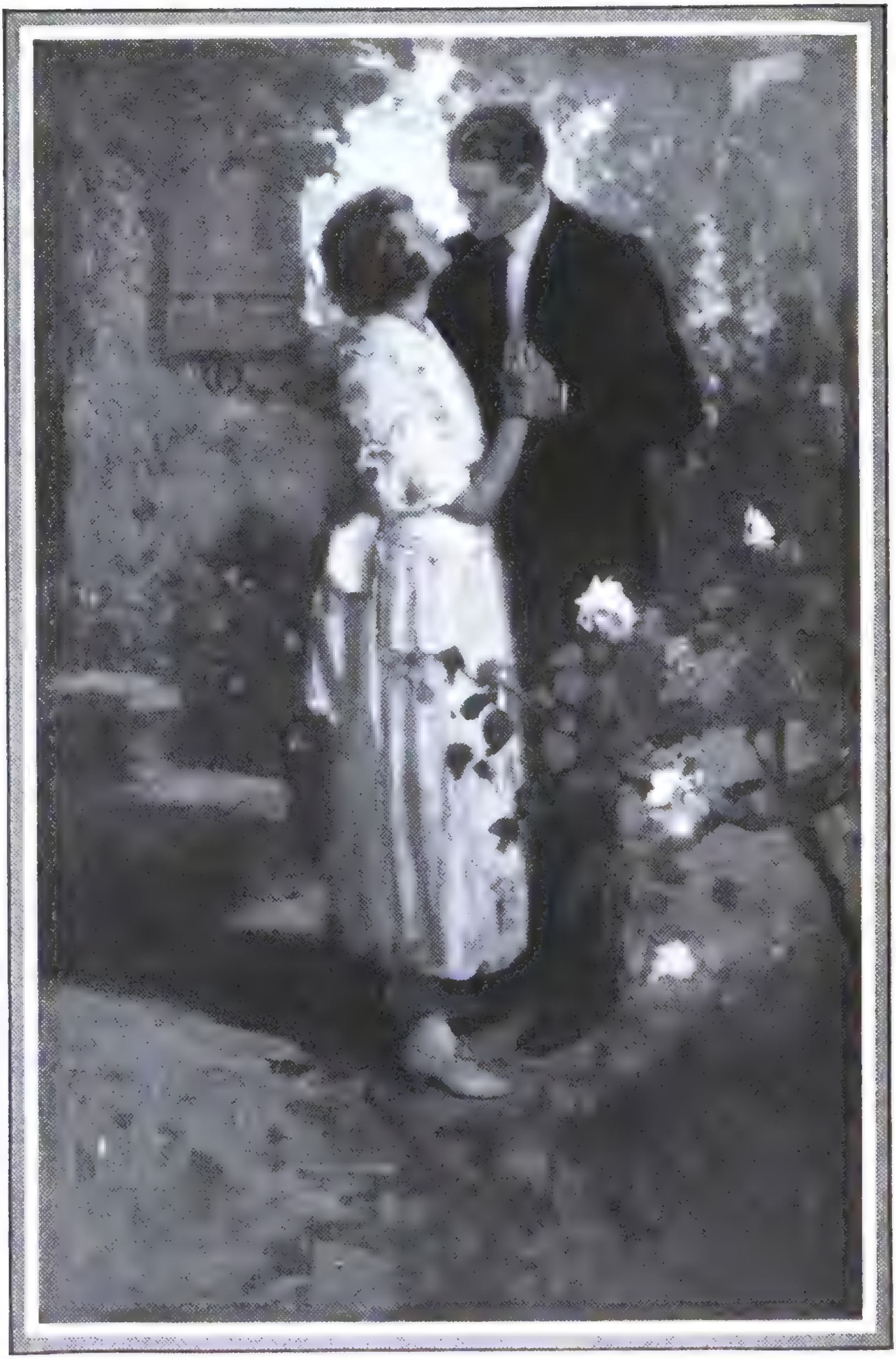
"On the level now." Canavan himself was pleading with Kennedy and me. "Put up that gat. I'll play fair."

Kennedy nodded, and smiled. "When thieves fall out!"

Canavan stepped over and, with one of those quick under-world frisking movements, ripped Wesley Brown's coat open.

"Don't I get no reward for recovering half o' them poils?"

Can a girl's face be changed, made like a counterfeit twenty-dollar bill—spurious? The Secret Service puts this question to Craig Kennedy—in February EVERYBODY'S, out January 15.



"Aren't you going to see me safely home, Archer? I know it's only across the street but——" He spun around and caught her in his arms.

Past Misdeeds Confront a Reformed Derelict

Mellowing Money

A Crisis in the Life of Griffith, ex-Bank-Breaker: Shall He Do Nothing and Go Free, While Innocent Boys Suffer? Or Shall He Let the Truth Out and Take the Penalty?

By Francis Lynde

Author of "The Real Man," "The Wreckers," "Pirates' Hope," etc.

Illustrations by J. M. Clement

Begin this serial with any instalment. The story up to this point is here.

ARCHER GRIFFITH hurried from the court-house and across the square to John Kingsley's car.

Behind him he had left the crowded courtroom where what promised to be at least the penultimate scene of the drama of his life was being played. Through his mind there chased the amazing series of events that had led up to it.

His youth in Bethsaida, his father's misfortunes, his own wild days. The coming of the war, his marriage just before he sailed for France. His return to discover that his wife was the consort of crooks and blackmailers, an adventuress and worse—and still his wife, whom, being what he was, he could not and would not divorce.

Then, like an evil, ugly dream, the months of his life as a tramp—with that ironic episode of his ejection from a freight in Bethsaida—his own town, the place of all places in which he would not be! His arrest—his sentence to a road gang. Then John Kingsley rescuing him, taking him into his home. And then the new knowledge of Margery Stillwell, and of his love for her, whom his friend Kingsley loved. And she, God help them both, loved him, Archer Griffith, tramp, crook, by Bethsaida's verdict!

Well, he had meant to clear the way. He had tried. His first real crime had been built upon the good intentions that are the paving-stones of hell. Kingsley, ironmaster, good citizen, had faced the loss of all he had because, caught in the financial depression, he needed more time than Amos Whittlesea, Bethsaida's miser banker, would give him to meet certain notes. And Griffith, cynically regardless of the law, had blown the bank safe to get those notes. And had, so, surprised Harriford and Jefferson, the young amateur crooks, as they tortured old Amos to make him open his safe! Now they were on trial—caught in the West.

Whittlesea had known what Griffith had done. Yet, dying next day, he had lived long enough to deal his shrewdest blow, as he supposed, at the town he hated. He had made Griffith, the Ishmael of Bethsaida, his heir. And Griffith, so, planning flight, had been laid by the heels. His own conscience and Margery Stillwell's faith in him had made him stay—made

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him make restitution, right and left, for Amos's exactions, his usury.

Now, facing ruin, the exposure of his marriage, he was on his way to bring back the one witness to his own part in the doings at the bank, the girl who could place him in the dock with Harriford and Jefferson. The heavens were about to fall.

HE LOST no time in backing the green roadster out of its place in the parking rank. Like a contestant preparing for a race, he stopped at the first public garage he came to, had the tank filled, saw to the oil supply, and went carefully over the tires and the running-gear. Of the man who was filling the tank he asked a single question: "How about the road to Watsonville?"

"Brick pavement all the way to Antona—that's thirty-eight miles. At Antona you take the crossroad over to the Lincoln; seven miles of dirt, but it oughtn't to be very bad with the dry spell we're having."

Griffith thanked the man and swung himself in behind the wheel. As his foot pressed the starter button he glanced at his watch. It was a little past ten, and there were ninety miles, fourteen of them over a country road, to be covered before the afternoon court session should begin. It seemed easily feasible, with a reasonably good road and a proved car; and for the first two or three miles after leaving the county seat—in a direction opposite to that in which Bethsaida lay—he held a moderate speed, letting the motor warm itself up gradually. But after that, for the dwellers along the highway, the passing roadster figured only as a green streak flying westward over the smooth metaling.

It was a quarter past eleven when the village of Antona came rushing up to meet the green car. There was a guideboard at the intersection of the country crossroad, so Griffith did not have to stop to inquire the way. But from the beginning of the second mile of cross-country running there was no more speeding. Leaving the level track of the main highway, the country road led into a region of hills and valleys, and whatever was gained in a downhill rush was lost in the thick dust or deadening sand of the next upward climb. Griffith did not spare the car, but in spite of his skilful juggling of throttle and gears it was a few minutes past noon when the green roadster came to a stand before a wayside filling station in the fringe of the small town of Watsonville.

As Griffith snapped the switch and reached for the door latch, the station keeper detached himself from the tilted chair placed in the shade of the doorway and came to the curb.

"Well?" he said, with a grin that might have been taken either as a greeting or as a menace. "It didn't take you long to trail us. What's eatin' you now, Arch? Ain't this business I've got here honest enough to suit you?"

"I'm not here to find fault with your business, Tom. I've come to see Roxie. Where is she?"

The grin faded from the hard face of the ex-roadhouse keeper.

"What you chasin' my girl for?" he growled.

"For no harm; you ought to know that. But I've got to find her, quick."

"Not before you tell me what you want of her."

Griffith climbed out of the car and faced the man who had so lately tried to kill him.

"I haven't time to quarrel with you now, Tom, and it's rather late in the day for you to try to stall with me. Where is she?"

WHILE one might count ten there was battle of nerve, hard blue eyes striving to measure the determination in cool gray. Then Gaffney jerked a thumb over his shoulder to indicate the direction in which his daughter might be sought, and went back to his tilted chair in the shade of the doorway. Griffith walked on through the building and out of it by way of a door in the rear. The filling station occupied one end of a long lot which ran through to a street paralleling the main highway. At the other end there was a comfortable cottage half hidden under magnificent elms. The Gipsy beauty was sweeping the back porch of the cottage as Griffith, swarthily pallid with the dust through which he had been hurling the borrowed roadster, came up.

"You, Archie?" she exclaimed, casting the broom aside. "What's gone wrong?"

"It's all wrong, Roxie, unless you make it right," he began gravely. "You are subpœnaed as a witness in the Harriford-Jefferson trial. Didn't you know it?"

"Well enough I knew it," said the girl,

with a toss of the shapely head. "That's the reason why nobody in Bethsaida besides you was told where we'd gone."

"But that won't do!" he protested. "Lawyer Travers knows what you know, and you'll have to tell it, sooner or later. Macallaster kept at it until he found out that you were the one who got out of the auto in front of the bank and went around to look in at the side door."

"I never told him, Archie; before God, I never did."

"I know you didn't. But you had the garage boy driving with you that night, and Macallaster got hold of him. You see where that leaves it. Travers is in court now, talking against time. I've come to take you back to the county seat with me."

"To go on the stand and swear you into the pen? 'Tis little you know about a woman, Archie Griffith!"

"Just the same, you must go. It will all come out, one way or another, now that Macallaster knows, and everybody will say that I bribed you to disappear. And I can't prove that I didn't; you know I can't, after giving you that note of your father's. You must go back with me and tell the truth, Roxie."

"I'll not go one step!"

"You must."

"Go back and tell them that you're a yegg—fling that mud at you and get you sent up for God knows how long? Not while I'm living, Archie, dear!"

"I say you must."

If the time had not been so critically short, or if he had not been so desperately in earnest, her sudden change of front when she said, "All right, then; wait for me," and darted into the house, might have put him on his guard. As it was, he waited, watch in palm, until the minute hand had measured a full quarter of an hour, and would have gone on waiting if Gaffney had not come up the path and accosted him.

"Find Roxie?" queried the newly minted gas and oil merchant, with his sour grin.

"Yes. I'm waiting for her to get ready to go back with me."

"You'll wait a damn' long time, then. She ducked around by the alley awhile back and took her car and skipped. I don't know which way she went."

Griffith turned away without a word. There was nothing more to be done in Watsonville, and five minutes later he was once more urging the green roadster through the dry-sand morasses of the crossroad. It was twenty minutes past one when the stout car wallowed through the last of the sand stretches and came out upon the paved highroad. Its driver, a mask of yellow dust from head to foot, bent over the wheel and stepped on the accelerator. A boy trundling a wheelbarrow-load of vegetables steered aside to clear the way. When he stopped to rest a few yards farther on and turned to look at the speeder, the green car had become a disappearing dot in the eastward distance.

WHILE Griffith was making his way out of the jammed courtroom to go in search of Roxanna Gaffney, Kingsley stood up and looked for Margery. When he placed her he found that she was not with her father; that in the press for seats they had become separated. Catching her eye, he pointed to the seat beside him just vacated by Griffith, and she came at once and took it.

When the impaneling of a jury began, the young woman whispered to ask where Griffith had gone, and Kingsley answered with a half-truth, saying that he had volunteered to go out and hunt up a missing witness for Travers.

"Then he will be back?"

"Oh, yes; but I don't know how soon."

"He will be called as a witness, himself, won't he?"

"He has already been summoned as a witness for the prosecution. Huddleston will want him to testify that he recognized the boys in Whittlesea's room, and when Travers gets hold of him he'll try to make him say that he didn't."

"Doesn't Mr. Travers know whether he did or did not?"

"I'm not certain. Travers has had some talk with Archer about the case, but I don't know the exact purport of it."

Somewhat to the disappointment of the spectators, who looked to see a battle royal fought between Travers and Huddleston in the selection of a jury, this preliminary was quite unexciting. With only two challenges on one side and one on the other, the twelve veniremen were drawn from the panel and took their seats.

With no loss of time Huddleston began

to read the indictment charging the two young men with the murder of Amos Whittlesea, and again Margery asked a whispered question:

"They are not to be tried for the vault dynamiting?"

"Separate indictments—can't include both offenses in one—trial for each," Kingsley murmured into the pink ear held up to him.

The fine-featured old judge was looking down over his spectacles at the two culprits.

"William Harriford and Matthew Jefferson, you have heard the charge in the indictment. Are you guilty or not guilty?"

Prompted by Travers, the two young men stood up and pleaded Not Guilty.

"Let the trial proceed," said the judge, turning to Huddleston; and the county attorney, a tall man, thin almost to cadaverousness, but with an eye that was suggestive of steel bits or other super-boring instruments, rose in his place at the end of the table. In a voice that sounded like the crackling of stiff parchment he offered Amos Whittlesea's dying declaration and prepared to prove it by calling as his first witness Dr. Grimshaw, the old physician Griffith had summoned on the night of the tragedy.

Taking the stand, the doctor told of the summons, which he had hastened to obey. In the bedroom over the bank he had found Amos Whittlesea suffering from a gunshot wound in the chest and had given him treatment therefor. Huddleston's questions followed quickly.

"Was Whittlesea able to talk when you reached him?"

"Oh, yes; quite able."

"What did he say?"

"He said he'd been shot; that two men had been trying to make him go down and open the vault in the bank—holding lighted matches to the soles of his feet to make him let go of the bedstead; that while they were doing this, Archer Griffith had come in and driven them off. As they were going out, one of them—he didn't know which one—turned and fired a pistol into the room."

"Did he say at that time that he recognized these two men?"

"He did. He said: 'I know 'em—know 'em both. One of 'em was Abel Harriford's boy, and the other was Abner Jefferson's.' I asked him if he were certain about that, and he said he was; that he would swear to it."

"Was there anything more said at that time bearing upon the identity of these two men?"

"Not at that time, no."

"But there was later on?"

"Yes. The day before Whittlesea died he made a formal declaration, attesting it before witnesses."

"Were you present when he made this declaration?"

"I was."

"What was the purport of this declaration?"

"He declared that he had recognized his assailants, and named them as William Harriford and Matthew Jefferson."

"Did Amos Whittlesea know he was a dying man when he made this statement?"

"He did. I had just told him that he might not live through the night."

"Very good," said Huddleston, and he turned to Travers. "You may take the witness."

TRAVERS began at once. "In your direct examination just now, doctor, you said that Whittlesea told you that the two men were trying to make him go downstairs and open the vault. Are you quite sure he used the word 'vault'? "

The old physician took time to consider. "No," he said at last, "I couldn't be entirely certain of that. He may have said 'safe.' Come to think of it, I believe he did say 'safe.' "

"Another question, if you please: Did Whittlesea tell you in that first talk that the two men were masked?"

"He did. He said they had black handkerchiefs tied across their faces just below the eyes."

"Did he explain to you how he came to be so certain of their identity when they were masked in that way?"

"He did not, and I didn't ask him."

While the cross-examination was going on, Huddleston was checking his list of witnesses. The name of Thomas Archer Griffith stood next to Dr. Grimshaw's, and Huddleston questioned his assistant, the red-headed Pott nephew.

"You subpœnaed Griffith, didn't you? Is he here?"

The red-headed young man looked around.

"He was here before court opened; sitting there in the front row with Kingsley."

"He's not there now: find out," was the curt command; and the young man went to the rail and spoke to Kingsley. When he came back he was shaking his head.

"He went out just as court was convening. Kingsley says he doesn't know where he has gone."

"Watch for him," was the whispered order, "and tell me when he comes back. He's next, but we can fill in." Then in swift succession he called Ingleburt, the druggist, Pott, Cartwright and a number of other Bethsaidans who had visited Whittlesea during the interval between the shooting and his death. To each of them the old man had repeated the story of the night of the storm, and in the mouth of each witness it was substantially the story he had told the doctor.

Travers, watching the slow procession of the hands of the clock on the wall over the judge's head, fought for delay. There was little or nothing to be gained by badgering the witnesses in cross-examination, but he spun it out as a time-killing process and to such good purpose that the clock hands were pointing to noon by the time the end of Huddleston's list had been reached. Griffith's name in the county attorney's memorandum was still unchecked, and as the judge's gavel fell for the noon recess, Huddleston gave a commission to the red-headed assistant.

"YOU'VE got an hour in which to find out where Griffith has gone, and to get after him with an instanter," he said. "Go to it and bring back the meat."

In the outpouring from the court-house Kingsley saw that Judson Stillwell had fallen in with some of his farmer friends and was heading for the hotel across the square.

"Your father doesn't want you," he said to Margery, "and the hotel will be crowded. Suppose we go around to Sebastein's for our snack."

Over the table in the café the young woman became anxiously curious.

"I want to know more about Archer," she began. "Has he told you the reason why he shouldn't be a witness in this trial?"

Kingsley nodded and said: "Yes; but I had guessed it before he told me. As to the witnessing, however, he had no choice. Huddleston was sure to summon him, as he did. He knows that if Whittlesea was able to identify Harriford and Jefferson, Archer must also have been able. As a matter of fact, I should suppose he'd be the star witness for the prosecution."

"Of course Mr. Travers doesn't know why Archer should not appear?"

"It's a safe bet that he doesn't. He is counsel for the bank, and if he knew what we do, he would have been trying to keep Archer out of it at all hazards."

"You told me you didn't know where Archer had gone. Was that the truth, John?"

"Technically. I couldn't explain in that crowded courtroom. This is what happened." And he told her what Travers had said about the nonappearance of Roxanna Gaffney, and what Griffith had replied.

"Then he has gone to find Roxanna."

"Yes. The Gaffneys pulled out of Bethsaida yesterday, and I don't know where they've gone. But I suspect Archer does."

A gridironing of fine lines appeared between the steadfast eyes of questionings.

"You shouldn't have let him go, John. Didn't he tell you that Roxanna *knows?*"

"Yes, he told me that, too."

"Then, if she comes here and is put on the stand——"

"I know: you'd say that Archer will be done for, hopelessly. But there are wheels within wheels in this business. Since Archer has turned over his new leaf he stands up so straight that he leans over backward. He held a note of ten thousand dollars over Gaffney's head, and he surrendered it upon the condition that Gaffney would close his dives and clear out of Bethsaida. Roxanna Gaffney is the only witness who can convict him of the vault-smashing, and any impartial judge, knowing the facts, would immediately assume that Griffith had bribed her to disappear. I'd suspect it myself if I didn't know better. Our best hope is that the chapter of accidents may intervene. Archer has taken my car, and the old bus may break down with him if he hurries it too much. Or he may not be able to find Roxanna."

The young woman to whom Griffith's fate meant more than it did to any other living person was still knitting her brows thoughtfully.

"Perhaps, John, we'd better hope it is the other way around," she said, after a moment's reflection. "If he finds Roxanna and brings her back with him . . . It's rather dreadful to suggest such a thing, but I—I really believe she will clear him."

"Clear him? How can she?"

"In a way that may seem quite obvious, and blameless—to her. She'll swear that the man she saw in the bank wasn't Archer."

"Yes, but, good heavens! That would be perjury!"

"Perjury doesn't mean anything to a woman in love."

Kingsley looked grave. "You don't mean that she is——"

"Oh, yes! She came to ask me to persuade Archer not to drive her father out of Bethsaida. It was perfectly evident then. I'm not blaming Archer, you understand. I don't believe he had ever given her any real encouragement. But she is fiercely in love with him, just the same."

"WHAT a tangle! You say if she is put on the stand she will clear Archer by swearing to a lie. Have you the remotest idea that this new Archer that we've lately been getting acquainted with is going to stand by and let her do it?"

"He can't help himself. If she goes on the witness stand she will have done it before he can interfere. If he interferes after that, he will be flatly accusing her of perjuring herself. Don't you see?"

Kingsley groaned. "He's between the devil and the deep blue sea! We must head this thing off if we can, Margery. If those two ever get into the courtroom together it will be all off and they'll both go to the pen, as sure as the Lord made little apples! If I only knew which way Archer went, I'd chase him and wreck that car, if I had to take a chance of breaking my own neck doing it!"

Their hasty luncheon dispatched, they went to post themselves upon the courthouse steps to watch for the return of the green roadster. The noon intermission was only an hour, and when the crowd began to stream in, Kingsley glanced at his watch.

"He's not going to make it," he averred, with a sigh of relief. "He has broken down somewhere, or else he can't find Roxanna. We may as well go in while there is some little chance of finding a place to sit down."

This time they were not so fortunate as they had been in the morning session. The only seats available were on a side aisle and pretty well back. As they were settling themselves, the prisoners were brought in and Huddleston was in earnest conference with his assistant.

"You say you couldn't get any trace of Griffith?" he was demanding.

"Not the slightest. Nobody seems to have seen him after he left the courtroom this morning. I've asked everybody and telephoned everywhere."

"You saw and talked with him when he was subpœnaed. Didn't you tell me that he was the one man we needed?"

"I told you that he fought off and wouldn't commit himself, but that I was sure he knew and would tell the truth under oath."

"Damn!" said the county attorney under his breath. "If I had thought there was any danger of his dodging, I'd have fixed him so he couldn't."

"What will you do?" asked the red-headed one.

"The only thing there is to do—rest on the dying declaration. We've made our case. But I wanted to clinch it with Griffith's testimony. Travers is going to try to prove an alibi; he's made that pretty plain. Have you told the sheriff to have his men keep on looking for Griffith?"

"Yes."

"All right. If Travers sets up a claim for an alibi we'll put Griffith on the stand in rebuttal after Travers gets through."

"You mean if Griffith can be found in time."

"He's got to be found! You keep your eye on the door." And then, in response to the judge's invitation to proceed, Huddleston rose and announced that the prosecution rested.

TRAVERS was apparently not at all anxious to begin for the defense. Like Huddleston, he was lacking his principal witness, and he was hoping against hope that Griffith would turn up in time with the missing girl. In many more words than the plain statement demanded, he set forth the claim that the prosecution had signally failed to fasten the crime charged in the indictment upon the prisoners at the bar. The fact of absolute identification was still unproved. It was true that the victim of the tragedy had assumed to identify his masked assailants, but there remained a reasonable doubt. That doubt he hoped to be able to turn into a certainty, and so on and so on.

When there no longer remained any excuse for repeating himself, Travers began to call his witnesses. Two young Bethsaidans, Ingleburt's son and another, testified shamefacedly that they had been members of a card party at the Willow Springs roadhouse on the night of the tragedy, and they both asserted that Harriford and Jefferson were there up to a late hour. In his direct questioning Travers did his best to make these young men fix the hour at some time later than the passing of the thunderstorm, and under his skilful leading they did so fix it. But when Huddleston took them their confidence left them completely and the point was lost.

Next, Travers tried to establish, and did establish by the testimony of several witnesses, the fact that three suspicious characters had been seen lurking about the Bethsaida railroad sidings on the day previous to the night of the crime. These men were variously described by those who had seen them, but the day telegraph operator at the railroad station proved to be the best—and most unshakable—of these witnesses. He had seen the men frequently during the day; sometimes they were together, but not always. He described them as "a tough-looking bunch," and gave, as an unsolicited opinion of his own, that they were tramps who had been ejected from some passing train.

Following this little side excursion—to which Huddleston had objected without having his objection sustained—Travers called a big-muscled workingman answering to the name of Blovier to the stand.

"Your full name, Mr. Blovier?"

"James Mastin Blovier—but most folks call me just 'Jim.' "

"What is your occupation?"

"I'm quarry boss at the Gowan quarries, three mile back o' Bethsaida."

"All right, Mr. Blovier; tell the court and jury in your own words, what you saw at your quarry on the day preceding the commission of the crime for which my clients are on trial."

"It was this way," the witness began, looking straight at the judge, and gripping the arms of the witness chair. "We'd knocked off f'r the noonin' and I was sittin' at the heel o' the derrick chewin' me dinner. Happens I squints up at the west edge o' the pit and sees a hobo-lookin' chap peekin' down at us. I don't think nothin' o' that till about the time I'm gettin' to the bottom o' my dinner bucket, I sees him peekin' down ag'in from t'other side o' the pit. When he ducks back out o' sight, I makes a sneak round through the timber to find out what he's up to. Am I tellin' it right, Mr. Judge?"

Judge Whitcomb's smile was altogether reassuring. "Yes; go on."

"As I says, I sneaks up 'mongst the trees and sees him just duckin' round the corner of our powder shanty. Maybe I'd 'a' let him go at that if I hadn't crope up to the shanty and found that the lock steeple had been prized out and put back ag'in. Right then I knowed we'd had a powder thief, and I took out after him; follered him through the woods till he come to a little creek and stopped by it. Then I snuck behind a tree and watched. I didn't know but what he was totin' a gat, and I didn't reckon a few sticks o' dinnamite was worth me gettin' killed for."

By this time the quarryman had the attention of everybody in the packed courtroom, and even the one sleepy member of the jury was awake and leaning forward in his chair.

"FOR a little spell I couldn't make out what he was doing. Then I saw he was fixin' to make a fire and boil some water in a bucket he had. I reckoned he was goin' to make him some coffee, 'cause he had a handout o' victuals wropped up in a newspaper. But he didn't make no coffee. I couldn't see very well exac'ly what he *was* doin' 'cause he had his back to me. Near as I could tell, he put somethin' in the newspaper and monkeyed with it a spell, and then tipped it out into the bucket and begin to cook it. After while he took the bucket off the fire and stirred in it with a stick, and it looked like he was skimmin' somethin' off the top. Next he pulled somethin' out of his clothes that looked like an auto grease gun and stuck it in the bucket, workin' it like he was suckin' the stuff out and squirtin' it into a bag o' some sort. About that time the quarry whistle blowed and I hustled to get back on the job."

"Very good," Travers approved. Then, shrewdly: "Didn't you know what this man was doing there at the creek while you were watching him?"

The quarry boss grinned sheepishly.

"Never once busted into my head till the next day when the word come that Mr. Whittlesea had been shot and the bank vault had been blowed open."

"But you know now, don't you?"

"Sure thing. He was cookin' dinnamite to make burglar soup."

"Now, then, describe this man for the court and jury as accurately as you can."

James Blovier tried it manfully, and made precisely the failure that nine persons out of ten make when they try to describe specifically any particular person they have seen. The man was neither very tall nor very short; he didn't look to be either fat or lean. He had on rough clothes, or that is, Blovier said, they might have been called "sort o' roughish." Questioned as to the color of the clothes, he said at first that they were brownish; then he changed and said they might have been grayish. Was the man clean-shaven, or did he have a beard? Here, again, incertitude gripped the quarryman, and he confessed that he couldn't remember. But he looked like a hobo; that much he would swear to.

At this point Travers clinched the nail he had been driving with James Blovier for a hammer.

"Mr. Blovier, turn around and look at the two prisoners at the bar and tell his Honor and the jury if either of them is the man you saw extracting the nitro-glycerin from dynamite on the banks of that creek."

The quarry foreman twisted himself in his chair and stared long and steadily at the two accused men. When he made his answer it was doggedly positive.

"Not a bit like neither one o' them."

"You are sure of that, are you?"

"I'd swear to it on a stack o' Bibles a mile high."

"All right," said Travers briskly. "The witness is yours, Mr. Huddleston."

HUDDLESTON made nothing out of Blovier. The quarry boss had told all he knew, and he had that excellent quality so seldom brought out on the witness stand—the ability to repeat his testimony any number of times without deviating from it in the slightest particular. When he took his seat, quite unflustered by Huddleston's grilling, Travers drove another nail into what he was now beginning to hope might possibly prove to be the coffin of Huddleston's case. In swift succession he called a number of witnesses who were able to construct a clean alibi for the two young men on the Thursday preceding the night of alarms. At the hour named by Blovier they were both in Gaffney's place in Bethsaida, as Travers was easily able to prove.

Travers's discovery of the quarryman had been wholly accidental, but he had seen at once what a strong factor it might prove to be when he should be ready to spring his theory of the "third man" upon the jury. To this theory he was still pertinaciously clinging, and Macallaster's assertion, that Roxanna was the one needed witness to clinch it, was what kept his purpose alive.

He was too experienced to hope that by demonstrating the theory he would get a verdict of acquittal. He knew that the jury was never impaneled that would decide against the direct and well sustained evidence of a dying man's statement. But if it could be proved that a third man, a professional safe-breaker, had done the dynamiting, the crime of the two young men would shrink at once to the assault and to a random shot fired recklessly in the moment of flight. But now, as in its inception, the success of this clever bit of dust-throwing turned upon the haling of Roxanna Gaffney into court, and her willingness to testify truthfully to what she had seen.

It was while Huddleston was cross-examining the last "alibi" witnesses that Travers's cunningly devised house of cards fell in ruins. There was a stir at the door of the courtroom and he saw Griffith enter—alone. That settled it. Either Roxanna could not be found, or she had refused to come. As Huddleston dismissed the witness under question, Travers gave up. There was nothing more to be done. When he rose in his place to say that the defense rested, he saw young Pott clutch Huddleston's arm and whisper excitedly in his chief's ear. The next instant Huddleston was on his feet, and his parchment-crackling voice penetrated to the farthest corner of the great room.

"Your Honor, the defense has attempted to establish an alibi for the prisoners at the bar. We wish to offer the testimony of a witness in rebuttal."

The judge bowed acquiescence, and Huddleston turned and said something to the court officer. The deputy stepped to the bar railing and bawled the formal summons: "Thomas Archer Griffith! Thomas Archer Griffith! Thomas Archer Griffith!"

Travers settled back in his chair with a frown of keen apprehension wrinkling between his shrewd eyes. For, arguing from his own experience, he was sure that Huddleston would not have called Griffith unless he had been fairly well convinced beforehand that his testimony, as that of an eyewitness, would fully corroborate the claim set forth in Amos Whittlesea's dying declaration.

KINGSLEY and the young woman at his side had a clear view of Griffith as he passed down the aisle in answer to the call. The dust on his face made him look haggard and worn, but his step was firm and he walked erect and with his head up. If there had hitherto been any uncertainty in Kingsley's mind as to Margery's feeling for Griffith, the light in her eyes would have dispelled it once for all. "Just like a brave soldier going to his death!" she whispered, and Kingsley tried to comfort her by whispering in return that the trial was only for the murder, and not for the burglary.

Huddleston lost no time. "Take the stand, Mr. Griffith," he snapped; and Griffith, mounting to a seat in the raised chair, took the oath to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, his clear-toned "I do," falling upon the hush like the clang of a mellow bell.

Huddleston passed rapidly over the formal questions for the record: the witness's name, place of residence and occupation. Then he went on crisply:

"State where you were, Mr. Griffith, on the night of the assault upon Amos Whittlesea."

"I was in Bethsaida."

"Tell the court and the jury what part you bore in the events of that night."

Like the quarryman, Blovier, Griffith sat with his hands gripping the arms of the witness chair. When he began to speak, his voice shook a little, but it grew steadier as he went on.

"At a little before one o'clock on the night in question I left Mr. John Kingsley's house, in which I was a guest, and went to the bank, admitting myself through the side door by means of a skeleton key. There, with a small quantity of nitroglycerin procured the day before from the Gowan quarries, I blew the vault door from its hinges."

If a bomb had suddenly exploded in the crowded courtroom the sensation produced thereby could scarcely have been greater than that evoked by these two straightforward sentences. As Griffith paused, a gasping murmur ran through the room, followed by a breathless hush which was sharply broken by a single voice somewhere in the back rows of seats saying "My God!" Instantly the court officer was upon his feet calling loudly for order; but when Griffith would have gone on, the judge was leaning over his desk and holding up a hand to stop him.

"It is my duty to tell you, Mr. Griffith, that under the law no witness is obliged to give testimony which will incriminate him," he warned. But Griffith went on calmly:

"I have sworn to tell the truth, your Honor, and that is what I purpose to do. There were certain papers in that vault which, for reasons that I hope I may not be required to explain, I wished to secure. I did secure them, and after I had disposed of them, and was on my way back to Mr. Kingsley's house, I heard Amos Whittlesea's cries for help and went to his assistance. In his room I found two masked men torturing him. He had locked his arms through the iron rods at the head of his bed, and they were trying to make him let go. Upon my entrance there was a fight and the two men escaped, one of them firing a random shot into the room as he dodged into the corridor. That is all, I think, save that I tried to pour some iodine into Mr. Whittlesea's wound, and then went for the doctor."

Once more a silence as profound as that of the grave had gripped the packed courtroom. Under his breath Kingsley was saying: "Good heavens—what a mistake! What a hideous mistake!" But the young woman who was clinging to his arm was whispering over and over again, *"Oh, thank God—thank God!"*

In the dead stillness the judge addressed the witness whose testimony had suddenly transformed him into a self-confessed criminal.

"BY YOUR own admission you have committed a criminal act for which the law imposes a severe penalty. Do you realize and concede that no pressure has here been brought to bear upon you to force you thus to incriminate yourself?"

Griffith bowed his head. "I do."

"In that case the court has no alternative but to remand you to custody to await the action of the grand jury."

Griffith bowed again.

"I fully realize that, your Honor."

There was a little pause, and then the kindly-faced old judge took a step aside from the strict formalities.

"Will you state, for the information of the court, Mr. Griffith, what your motive is in thus confessing a crime which, in all human probability, would never have been traced to you?"

Griffith hesitated for a moment, and when he looked up to reply every ear was strained to catch his low-spoken answer.

"Your Honor, there was a time, not so long ago, when I would not have done it; when I would have saved myself at whatever cost to others. But since that time I have been made to realize that no man lives to himself alone, or dies to himself. I have broken the law of the land, and I am willing to pay the penalty; rather let me say that I am anxious to pay it. For not otherwise can I hope to stand before my fellow-townsmen as the man they are now willing to believe I am."

The judge looked at Huddleston.

"Do you wish to examine the witness further?"

"I do," Huddleston asserted. Then to Griffith: "Did you recognize the two men whom you found in Amos Whittlesea's room?"

"Not so that I could swear positively to their identity; no."

"Do you mean to tell the court and the jury that you could fight with two men in a lighted room and not recognize them if they were known to you before?" was the sharp demand, and now the parchment-crackling voice was harshly accusative.

"Yes; I mean to say just that," was the steady answer.

For fully a quarter of an hour Huddleston subjected his victim to a grilling that was like the blows of a whip upon a bare back, but Griffith proved stubbornly immovable. He had not tried to identify the two men, and he had not done so sufficiently to state under oath that he knew positively who they were. That was all Huddleston could get out of him.

The county attorney gave it up at last, and signified to Travers that he might have the witness. But Travers, who was in earnest whispering conference with his two clients, shook his head. Griffith stepped down from the high chair, and, crossing to where the court officer was sitting, held out his wrists. But the big deputy who was serving in lieu of the sheriff merely grinned.

"Nothin' like that," he said out of the corner of his mouth; "*you* ain't goin' to try to make no get-away. Sid-down here with me."

Travers struggled to his feet and asked permission of the court to confer with the opposing counsel. The two lawyers went aside together and talked for a few moments in low tones. When Travers went back to his place and addressed the court it was to throw another bomb of astonishment into the crowded room. On behalf of the two young men he withdrew the plea of Not Guilty and entered one of Guilty to a charge of involuntary manslaughter, following the formal legal announcement with an eloquent appeal for that clemency of the court upon which the two misguided young men were now solely dependent.

There was a strained silence in the courtroom while he dwelt upon the youth of the pair, and the punishment that was already theirs in the unlooked-for and wholly unintended consequences of their offense, and the silence was broken by a sighing murmur of something like repressed applause when he said that the manly and self-sacrificing example of the concluding witness for the prosecution had prompted his clients to confess their fault and throw themselves upon the mercy of the court.

What followed passed for Griffith like the fleeting scene-shiftings of a dream. Abstractedly he heard the judge say that the pronouncing of sentence would be deferred to a future day, and then with a tap of the gavel, court was adjourned and Griffith found himself following the burly deputy through the side corridor that led to the jail.

"I guess there ain't much need to lock *you* up," said the big deputy, with a good-natured smile; "but rules is rules."

Griffith glanced back along the corridor and saw another deputy coming with the two young culprits.

"Let's have it over with," he said quickly. "Show me my place and lock me up. I don't want to have to meet those two boys—not now."

And a moment later one of the many steel doors in the grim building had clanged shut behind him and he was alone.

THE grand jury being in session, Griffith was indicted at once, and his trial, which, in the circumstances, was a mere formality, was scheduled to follow in due course. The interval between his indictment and his appearance in court was spent in jail, though all Bethsaida was willing to sign his bail bond, and Travers, after exhausting all arguments to move him, cursed him feelingly for an obstinate fool.

"You needn't be so damned greedy over the lock-up business; you'll get enough of it before you're through!" was the way the exasperated attorney expressed himself; but Griffith only smiled.

"What's the use, Travers?" he said. "You tell me Judge Whitcomb has consented to advance my trial on the docket, and what good would it do me or any one if I should go back to Bethsaida for a few days? As I have told you, my business affairs are all in Kingsley's hands, and I'm out of it. As for the lock-up part of it, I may as well be getting used to that. I'm likely to have some years of it to worry through."

"You're not letting go all holds?" snapped Travers.

"Nothing like it. But I have a thing to do, and I want to get about it and do it and have it over with."

"What in the name of common sense ever made you tip the fat into the fire the way you did when you were called to the stand, Griffith? Those boys were not being tried for the burglary; it was for the murder. All in the world that Huddleston expected of you was to have you say whether or not you had recognized them in Whitlesea's bedroom."

"I know," returned Griffith mildly. "And if I had stopped with that, the boys would have to do time for me as well as for themselves. You know I couldn't let it go that way, Travers."

The lawyer was sitting on the cell cot-bed with his hands locked over a knee. For a moment his gaze rested upon Griffith with shrewd curiosity pointing it.

"You're a puzzle to me, Griffith," he declared. "When I first saw you—in the jail at Bethsaida on that Southwick case—I took you for just the ordinary young fellow gone bad, and——"

"I was," Griffith cut in.

"That was only a few weeks ago; and now you're not the same man at all."

"Oh, yes, I am; precisely the same man, plus a bunch of money—mellowing money, I suppose you might call it."

"You can't tell me!" protested the lawyer, rising to rattle the cell door for the turnkey. And as the jailer came to let him out: "You won't think better of that bail offer?"

"Not worth while," the prisoner refused; and so the matter ended.

Three days later Griffith was summoned to trial, and the ordeal, which was chiefly one of having to face a courtroom once more crowded to its utmost capacity, was soon over. Huddleston read the indictment—on such and such a date the prisoner at the bar "did feloniously, and with felonious intent, break, enter, enter into and burglarize the premises known as the Security Bank of Bethsaida," and all the rest of it. Griffith, with Travers at his elbow, pleaded guilty, and at a signal from the kindly-faced old judge, stood to receive his sentence; stood and dared not look aside for fear he might see Margery and Kingsley, both of whom, he was sure, would be somewhere in the packed mass of onlookers.

IN ACCORDANCE with a custom which he had long pursued, the judge did not limit himself to a bare pronouncing of sentence upon the accused. Looking over his glasses at Griffith, he addressed him with the judicial severity tempered somewhat by a certain grave kindliness.

"There are times when, in the upholding of the law, the duty of the court must needs seem harsh and unmerciful. Thomas Archer Griffith, you stand self-convicted of an act of lawlessness for which the statutes impose a most severe penalty. Though it has come to the knowledge of the court that your crime was not committed for any object of personal gain—that the object was, in fact, a purely unselfish one—this does not lessen your culpability. You are a sane man, a well-educated man, and your act was committed with full knowledge of its criminality, and of the consequences which must accrue upon its discovery.

"In pronouncing sentence upon you the court is constrained to enter its solemn protest against an attitude which is unhappily becoming far too common: the assumption that the private citizen is justified in attempting to right his own wrongs, or the wrongs of his friends, without an appeal to the law of the land. The motive in your own case was generous, but the act itself was, as you very well knew at the time, a contemptuous flouting of all law and order; it was, in fact and in essence, a deliberate crime, premeditated and prepared for, and as such it must bear its just punishment.

"The sentence of this court is that you shall be confined in the State's prison, at hard labor, for the term of five years."

There was no demonstration, unless a murmur like the wind sighing through forest tree-tops was the crowded room's expression of regretful protest. Almost at the instant the judge ceased speaking, the clerk began calling the next case, and the court officer, this time Sheriff Becker himself, was leading Griffith away. In the sheriff's office in the jail the convicted man turned upon his broad-shouldered escort to say:

"Mr. Becker, how soon can you send me to the capital?"

"How soon, you say? You mean how long can I delay it, don't you? You'll want to be seeing your lawyer and your friends before you go, won't you?"

Griffith shook his head slowly. "No; I'd rather not see any one," he answered. "My business affairs are in good hands, and my will is made. Five years, the judge said: let them begin as soon as possible, Mr. Becker. It will be better so."

The sheriff looked at his watch.

"There is a train passing Noble Junction in half an hour. I guess we might get you over there in my car. Are you in that much of a hurry?"

"Why not?" said the convict.

And so it was arranged.

THE winter had come and gone and the early trees were just beginning to show their tender greens heralding the coming of spring, when Archer Griffith, once more a free man, walked out of the warden's office in the penitentiary to find Kingsley waiting for him at the door of the visitors' room. There were few words to go with the clamping hand-grip: "You, John?" from the freed prisoner, and, "Archer, old man!" on the part of the young ironmaster. But in the train which was presently hurrying them toward Bethsaida, Kingsley was moved to be reproachful.

"Eight months, Archer," he protested; "and in all that time you have refused to see anybody or to hold any communication with us. Why?"

"Call it selfishness," said Griffith. "I thought—I had no reason to think otherwise—that I had five years of it ahead of me. I knew it would make those years interminably longer if I allowed myself to be reminded of what I was missing. That may not be very clear to you; I guess you'd have to wear the stripes yourself, John, to really understand what they make you feel."

"Let it go," said Kingsley generously; "though you might have known that Bethsaida wouldn't rest until you'd been pardoned out."

"Bethsaida?"

"Practically the whole town. Nobody ever saw anything like it. Before your sentence was a week old, a petition was circulating, and I think everybody who saw it signed it. Deacon Harriford started it, and it was he and old Joel Bradford who secured the signatures of the judge and Huddleston."

"The deacon!" Griffith exclaimed, with a faint smile. Then: "Go on, John; I can believe anything now."

"A dozen of the older men, with the deacon as chairman, formed a committee, and it has been absolutely tireless. For some reason unknown to anybody, the Board of Pardons has been holding us up, or we'd have had you out before snow flew."

"Mellowing money," said Griffith musingly. "That is what I named it once for

Travers—old Amos's fortune. It has mellowed a lot of people besides me." Then, with a pleading roughness in his voice: "News, John: what else has been happening?"

They were fortunate enough to have the Pullman smoking-room to themselves, and Kingsley reached for the match box and relighted his cigar.

"Quite a number of things. For one, Bethsaida gets a branch plant of Universal Motors; bought the old Lapsley acreage between the Star plant and the river, and ground was broken two weeks ago. It will double our population."

"And spoil the Bethsaida we've known all our lives," Griffith put in soberly.

"Change its complexion a bit, to be sure; but you have no kick coming. The Universal people have made the Security Bank their local depository, and are asking to have a savings department put in for the benefit of their employees. I've secured an option on the lot next to the bank, so you can enlarge if you want to."

"Don't bury me too deep," Griffith begged. "What else?"

"Macallaster has gone. Travers, acting for the bank, closed him out, and the *Telegraph* has been sold."

GRIFFITH winced at that and said: "The paper was my father's one little ewe lamb. I wish you'd bought it in for me."

"I did. But I sold it again."

"To whom?"

"You wouldn't guess in a month of Sundays. To Lester Bainbridge. He's been knocking around all over the shop as a sort of free lance, doing specials for the syndicates and the A. P., and he says he has always wanted to own and edit a country paper. He had a bit of money saved up and I took it away from him. He's a winner as a newspaper man. You won't know the *Telegraph*. Why don't you smoke?"

Griffith had taken a cigar from Kingsley's pocket case when it was offered, but he had not lighted it.

"Abstinence—I haven't smoked since last September," he said briefly. "I'll wait and begin by littles with a pipe. But you haven't told me all. A penitentiary sentence wasn't the only thing I was facing when I left Bethsaida."

"The woman, you mean? She came, as you said she would: put up at the St. Nicholas and lost no time in showing up at the bank. Luckily, I happened to be there to meet her. She hadn't heard of your retirement, and when I told her, she swore very feelingly; intimated that you'd done it to dodge. But she said that didn't make any difference; she was going to have her rights in your property, and wanted to know where she could find a lawyer. Again the luck held. Travers happened to be in Bethsaida that day, and he came in while she was asking. Thinking we might need his help when the time came, I had already put him next in this affair of yours. When I introduced him, he excused himself and went out. A few minutes later he came back, bringing Bainbridge with him. The moment she saw Lester, the lady swore again."

"Why?" Griffith asked shortly.

"Because Lester was hep to her little game, and she knew he was. After you dropped out of New York three years or more ago, Bainbridge got a job of reporting on one of the big dailies—criminal court assignments and the like. In that way he came to know the lady and her record. She fooled you good and plenty, Archer. Your marriage with her was no marriage at all, just as I once told you Bainbridge had told me. She was an adventuress, right. She went through the motions of marrying at least four of our men who were going across, and instead of being the first, you were the last. More than that, she had a real husband living before she began making these investments in soldier allotments."

"Nevertheless, it was a marriage, of a sort, John. I can't dodge that."

"No," Kingsley denied, "it wasn't even that. You were supposed to be married by one of the slum missionaries, weren't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, the man was a plain faker—a member of her father's gang of yeggs and come-on men. He had no more authority to marry people than I have. Bainbridge had dug it all out, and she knew he had. She wanted to duck, quick, when she saw him come in with Travers. Travers was for holding her, but, of course, I wouldn't let him do that. I bought her a ticket to New York and put her on the next eastbound train. You'll never hear from her again."

"Then she didn't stay long enough in Bethsaida to blacklist me?"

"No. For some reason of her own she didn't register under your surname at the St. Nick; she appeared on the books as 'Mrs. Archer, New York.'"

"When was all this?" Griffith asked.

"About three weeks after you left us. It's safely a back number; and after what Travers told her—about how the Department of Justice was looking for just such women as she had proved herself to be—I'll bet she couldn't be found now with a search warrant."

Griffith's seat was next to the window, and for a long time he sat in silence, looking out at the fields and orchards and comfortable farmsteads slipping backward in an unending procession as the fast train bored its way into the sunset. The eight months of confinement had left few marks upon him. There was little of the prison pallor, and—possibly owing to some kindly hint from the state capitol—his hair had been allowed to grow to a respectable length. If the strong jaw had taken on a more determined cast and the eyes were graver, this was the most that could be said, though Kingsley had been quick to observe that his rare smile no longer fell into the lines of the old trampish grin.

THUS far, Margery's name had not been mentioned, and in his heart of hearts the freed convict was giving place to a great and nameless fear. Now that he was free in every sense, so far as the law was concerned, he began to realize that a burden of mistakes and blunderings and evil deeds cannot be cast aside and flung into the nearest pit of oblivion at will. Though the cords were loosened, the burden would not fall. Was love, the love of a good woman, strong enough to ignore the deforming backload he would carry to the end of his life?

Kingsley was patient, and he waited long before he broke into his seatmate's reverie.

"You haven't told me anything about yourself, Archer; what the eight months have been doing to you," he reminded the silent one.

"There isn't much to tell," was the quiet answer. "They were very good to me; much kinder than I deserved. It was a time for thought—long thoughts . . . John, if I should ever have a son of my own——"

He stopped and when the pause had grown long, Kingsley gave the needed impulse.

"Well, if you should?"

"I shall never let him grow up thinking that a past—any kind of a past—can ever be buried and forgotten; that he can sow without having to reap in just measure. It can't be done, John. You can never heap earth enough on the grave of the past to keep it down. That is one thing I have learned in these eight months, and I shall have to go on learning it all the days of my life. I'm not kicking, you understand. I've earned what is coming to me, and I'll try to pay like a man. But no son of mine shall ever have to pay such a debt if I can help it."

The final railroad crossing had clanked under the flying wheels, and in the gathering dusk the returning exile began to recognize the familiar encompassments of the old home town. Who shall say what emotions were stirring within him when the train slowed for the well-remembered station.

"I would rather not meet anybody this first evening if I can help it, John," he was saying, as they made their way out through the sleeper vestibule at the stop. But that hope was dashed when he descended the car steps and found himself the nucleus of a cheering, hand-shaking, congratulating crowd, with Deacon Harriford and Pott for its chief spokesmen.

"Dum it all—they jest had to let ye go, Arch," the deacon cackled. "We jest made up our minds we wa'n't goin' to give 'em no peace till they did." And then, trying to draw him aside: "My boy, Arch: is he—is he——"

"Yes," said Griffith; "he is well, and doing well; stacking up good-behavior time like a man. And so is Matt. You'll have William back one of these days to be a comfort to you."

Kingsley dragged him out of the crowd when he could, and they went around the station building and across the square where Kingsley's car was stored. There was some little delay. While Kingsley was lifting the hood and tinkering with the car's machinery, Griffith stood in the doorway and waited. On the Third Street side of the square the little lunch-box-on-wheels of the Greek, Petropaulos, was drawn up, the flare of the lately-lighted gasoline stove

HE SPUN around and caught her in his arms, and the pent-up passion of weary months was shaking him when he drew her close and kissed her. "Sweetheart — sweetheart!" he murmured. "I thought I'd lost you, and I was afraid to ask anybody what had become of you. Where were you?"

"I've been here all the time, but I—I couldn't let you find me, dear; there were too many of them here, and I knew—I knew what you'd do."

He sat on the broad step and drew her down beside him.

"I'll take you home in a few minutes, but first you must listen. Months ago, on the porch across the street, I promised you, dear, that I'd play the game to the end, and play it square. Have I made good?"

"You have—oh, so abundantly! If you could only know how proud I am!"

"But it leaves me a pardoned convict, Margie. Can you ever forget that?"

"I don't want ever to forget it. Do you know what I said that day when you made that brave confession in court?"

"No."

"I said 'Thank God!' and I meant it from the bottom of my heart. For then I knew that you had fought your way to the heights, and that nothing they could do to you could make you lose the vision that had been given you. John was almost heartbroken; but I—my heart was singing. Can you understand that?"

"I can, indeed. And now there is only one thing more—the woman that I thought I married; has John told you about her?"

"Yes."

"That is a sorry blot, Margery; and I can't rub it out. Is your love strong enough to make you blind when you look that way?"

She was sitting up, with her chin propped upon her clasped hands. And the steadfast eyes were looking past him and into the infinite when she said: "I shouldn't be a woman in love, dear, if I didn't lay the blame at her door and find a million excuses for you."

"Oh, but you mustn't do that!" he protested. "It is past and gone, but I must bear my share of the blame in that, too. If I could only be sure that in the days to come you won't——"

"It is written on my heart that I won't, O man that I love!" she said softly. And then: "That's Daddy on the porch looking for me. He knows everybody's gone by this time. Good night, my beloved. I must run."

But when she went, she did not go alone.

THE END

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February *EVERYBODY'S*—out January 15

pricking out its small square windows in the gathering darkness. Griffith's gaze became the absent, unseeing stare of retrospection. Was it less than a year ago that he had sat at the little Greek's counter in the misty dawn of that first morning, eating a tramp's breakfast and turning over in his mind the half-formed grotesque purpose of shaming respectable Bethsaida? Small wonder if it seemed incredible that the incomplete year could have witnessed so many and such revulsionary changes.

The green roadster's motor took the spark and Kingsley's voice broke into the retrospective musings.

"HOP in, Archer, and we'll go away from here," he said; and a few minutes afterward the green car was flicking under the suspended street-crossing lights in Maple Avenue and ascending the gentle grade which began just beyond the Baptist Church corner.

It was just opposite the Stillwell cottage, only on the farther side of the avenue, that the motor coughed and stopped, and once more Griffith came back to earth.

"Motor gone bad on you again, John?" he said, as Kingsley reached across him and opened the car door.

"The motor? No; here's where we stop."

Griffith got out and stood on the sidewalk. The house before which the car had halted, his boyhood home sheltering itself in the thickly growing evergreens, was lighted in both stories, and there were people, many of them, it seemed, clustering about the open front door and on the porch. Without a word, Kingsley opened the gate and led him in, and then he realized. Kingsley had bought the place at the sheriff's sale, and now it was his own. And the crowding guests?

It was a repetition of the scene at the railroad station; only now there were many more, and many of them women. Griffith passed from group to group in the thronged rooms, shaking hands and listening over and over again to the heart-warming words of welcome as one in a maze.

Were these the people for whom, less than a year ago, he had felt only sardonic contempt? the smugly hypocritical fault-finders of his hot-hearted boyhood imaginings? How short-sighted he must have been in those and later days not to have realized that the mellowing spark is planted in every human breast, and that, blown alive by the quickening breath of appreciation and sympathy, it may, and does, upon occasion, burn away all the dross and shams and let the light of a common humanity shine forth!

And the many ways in which the kindliness had manifested itself in this preparation for his home-coming; every article of the well-remembered furnishings had been replaced; the hangings at the windows, the cretonne-covered lounge in the sitting-room, the pictures on the walls, his father's desk in the boxlike little den where so many editorials for the paper had been written, the old-fashioned black-walnut dining-table—nothing was missing. And all these, as Aunt Mary Pettiman took occasion to tell him, were gifts—the gifts of friends. The Macallasters had cleared the house of all the old furniture when they took possession, auctioning it off, and the various pieces had been scattered far and wide.

It was over, after a time, even the stand-up supper of sandwiches and salad and cake and coffee served in the homelike dining-room. Through it all Griffith still moved as one in a dream, though now the dream was a troubled one. One face and form he looked for in vain. Margery was not there. Nobody had even so much as mentioned her name, and he was afraid to ask; afraid he might be told he knew not what.

The last of the guests were stringing down the walk to the gate. Griffith went to the steps with Kingsley, who seemed to be in more of a hurry than any waiting office work would warrant.

"What a fine night it is—just like summer!" he said. And then: "I'll come up to the bank and put you in the saddle in the morning, but now I must vanish. We began running night shifts last Monday, and that was the time when my stenographer had to quit on me and get married. My desk looks like a house afire. Good night, old man. Better turn in early and get your beauty sleep."

Griffith saw him go down the walk and get into his car and start it. As the green roadster shot up to the next street to make its downtown turn, a low voice at his elbow said: "Aren't you going to see me safely home, Archer? I know it's only just across the street, but——"

Half a Man

A Girl Who Dreamed Dreams and a Man Who Sorely Needed Her Are Brought Together in a Love Romance of Great Charm

By Elizabeth Van Deusen

Illustration by J. M. Clement

"THEY'RE coming!"

Tessie was the speaker. Cynthia, who was the listener—and listening was Cynthia's strong point—fairly jumped. But she finished waiting on the mink-coated woman, who insisted on having three French puffs at the dozen rate, before she asked, "Who's coming?"

Tessie's answer was warm, positively hot, but it cooled off when it reached Cynthia. "Why, those men!" She gave a flip of her hand toward two men, who were coming down the aisle. "They pick out girls to be in the fashion show. Don't you remember how grand it was last year?"

A recollection of last year's show came to Cynthia. Not that she had seen the show. Fashion parades are not held for employees. But she recalled the fact that Tessie had not been at the bakery counter during a large part of the three-day exhibit, and that Tessie had described with convincing accuracy the mandates of the lords of apparel—indeed, she appeared to have first-hand knowledge.

Tessie continued: "I'd just love to be in it. May Brannigan—she's my friend in the waists—said she'd speak to her buyer about me. Of course, they'll likely pick me anyhow, but a pull don't do any harm."

Cynthia looked at Tessie in dumb wonder. It wasn't Tessie's good looks that invited her admiration. It was Tessie's fine conceit. She admitted Tessie's prettiness—her proud claim to possessing a silhouette, and the ease with which she eliminated her hips; but Cynthia's unstinted approval was reserved for Tessie's confidence—her almost offensive conceit. For of confidence Cynthia hadn't a particle. And if you wear a cheap suit three years—once relined by your grandmother—you and fashion are scarcely on bowing terms. And as for looks, Cynthia had her grave doubts, and seemed content to be lost in the crowd. Aside from all these negative qualities, she had a callus, which hurt, on the bottom of her left foot.

Cynthia and Tessie worked in Department 80 of Lowden & Meyers' department store, Fulton Street, Brooklyn. Department 80 is where they sell a complete line of baked goods, everything from bread to French pastry, with way stops for pumpernickel and patty shells. If you consider that there were seventy-nine departments before they put in the bakery, you will be right in concluding that it was a large store. There were nine girls behind the baked-goods counter, and by some freak of propinquity and opposition Cynthia and Tessie paired.

Cynthia had worked in bakeries ever since leaving school. For that matter the baking business was becoming a sort of family tradition. Her father, Henry Peyton, had sold his farm, and bought a bakery in Meade Springs, the nearest town. The bakery had been as successful as the size of the town permitted. Then Henry, with his wife Ann consenting, had gone in search

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of a larger town; and with one bound landed in Brooklyn. Then he died. Somehow Ann couldn't consent to his death; so soon after she joined him. Their eldest child, Jerry, had obtained a job as scrap boy in a pie-baking factory, so that Cynthia knew all the tricks of the trade—from how the cream came to be in the éclair to the deep-laid scheme by which sales of molasses fruit cake were advertised to take place on Mondays. It was the rush of bargain hunters, that had surged about them on Monday, that was causing her foot to hurt on Wednesday.

Tessie was down on her heels, tactfully enhancing the war of the roses in her cheeks and lips. Cynthia nearly pushed her over, when she crowded by to wait on customers.

Strolling down the aisle were the two men—two men without hats; so Cynthia or a stranger might have seen them, but to Tessie they were kings, gods, givers of desire; in short they chose the wearers of the decrees of fashion, and Tessie mightily desired to be one of the wearers. As they came nearer, she rose and allowed them to see her. She knew they saw her. In fact they stopped near the counter, but with all her listening she could not hear a word.

"Oh, Cynthia! I hope they take me."

Cynthia, standing on the sole of one foot and the toe of the other, the aching one, gave Tessie an instant's undivided attention; then she said, heartily, "I hope they do, Tessie."

When the first bell rang they closed the cases on what remained unsold. Unless business became less brisk, there was small chance of a sale of molasses fruit cake on Monday.

When the second bell rang Cynthia pulled off her tissue cuffs, her white apron—laundered by the firm and clean daily—her black sateen cover apron—laundered by herself and clean weekly—and joined the throng of girls hurrying toward the stairs. The throng gathered numbers at each floor, and almost carried Cynthia down to the basement, through the tunnel under Livingston Street, then up to the coat lockers, then outdoors.

SHE always liked the first breath of outdoors—not minding so much the aching foot, or the tired little sport hat on at no angle at all. Part of the crowd of girls was with her until she came to her home street—to Atlantic Avenue. Long, wide, ferry-tending Atlantic Avenue, having all sorts of small stores, housing all kinds of people—rich men on the Heights, poor men, beggar men, and in a certain cold-water, walk-up flat furnishing a home for Cynthia.

It always seemed to her that the war had sneaked across South Ferry in the fog of early morning, and now when she heard boats calling and answering—sometimes in the dead of night—the voices of the river seemed to bring Jerry back to her.

When she came to her home block, Victor was waiting for her. His last name was Pomfret. If you had ever heard the saying, "There was a little man, and he had a little soul," it would pop into your head, when you saw Victor. He roomed with the Peytons, and washed his underwear in the bathroom. To him a budget was a god—to alter it was blasphemy.

Somehow Cynthia knew that he had been waiting some time. He looked her up and down. He started to kiss her, but Cynthia started back with a sharp cry—not of fright or cowardice, not wholly of repugnance, but it was a pitiful cry, for Victor said he meant to marry her. He told grandma so. And Cynthia could not bear to have him touch her.

"I want you to go out with me to-night."

His tone was not that of one making a request—it was that of one stating an uncontrovertible fact. Evidently, under the heading marked "Recreation," a sufficient sum had accumulated to permit of a show and hot chocolate. Victor always insisted on her having hot chocolate, while Cynthia preferred something frosted in a tall glass.

"Please, Victor, I'm too tired and my foot hurts."

It was almost a wail. Her refusal was hard for him to understand. It was as if Cinderella had said to the fairy godmother, "Begone." For Victor counted himself desirable male, and assertiveness, and good provision; and he knew that Cynthia was poor, and timid, and twenty-seven.

She could never give a good reason to Victor for not marrying him. But she never troubled to give herself any reason, except "I can't bear to have him touch me." To Cynthia that was reason enough—unchangeable. She could not tell Victor why she would not marry him. You see he had a room—one of the five—in the Peyton flat; and they needed his money to help pay the rent. This was a complication. Poverty is not always such a simple matter.

Victor followed her to the string of rooms where lived the last of the Peytons. There was Grandma Peyton, with bewildered eyes and hands, grown old in homesickness, forever voicing her desire to go back to Meade Springs, somehow conveying the impression that she would find her husband and son alive and waiting for her there—always hating the noise and the neighbors, with her anger rising to fever pitch whenever she used the pulley line. Then there was Mazzie, five years younger than Cynthia, happy in the city fun—almost any man to almost any dance pleased Mazzie; working in a paper-box factory, saving her money for a fur coat: not unloving, but apparently capable of enjoying herself, if there had not been another Peyton on earth. And there were two boys—afterthoughts on the part of Henry and Ann Peyton—named Jock and Andrew, twelve and fourteen, blond and naughty. And there was Prince, the cat.

And in a top drawer a bundle of papers, a sun-marked service flag—a memory of Jerry Peyton, Cynthia's special brother, who had promised to bring her home a husband from France.

It did not matter to Cynthia that there was not much for supper. She had the rent money, and she could not worry about anything else to-night. But the boys wanted lots to eat of meaty substance and sweetness—they even specified pork chops and cream puffs. Cynthia tried to quiet them. But the boys were modern, late-pattern modern, believing that the effectual way to obtain what you want is to ask for it—to ask some one who can gratify your desires, point-blank, and then see what happens. At this juncture Victor went forth from the flat, where he was not supposed to have his meals, to buy pork chops and cream puffs for six.

Cynthia went to her room to cry. She felt that she had earned the right. But Mazzie was there, so Cynthia postponed her weeping. She took off her store clothes, slipped on her lavender bungalow apron. It was mussy. She should have asked grandma to wash it, but it didn't matter. She eased her feet with some old ties, and twisted her coil of brown-gold hair high on her head. Generally she wore it twisted around the back of her head, and it was forever sagging too low. The hair needed washing. Sunday was the day for that. To-night she was too tired to care, too tired to eat much—almost too tired to spring back, when Victor took hold of her elbow.

Mazzie made supper fairly gay. She laughed and joked with Victor. Then she sallied forth with her man of the moment to new delights. Sometimes, often in the night hours, a terror gripped Cynthia, because they rarely knew the last name of Mazzie's man, or their destination. Suppose a night came when Mazzie did not come home—come poking her key in and then slamming the door sometime after midnight. Could they ask the police to look for her? Tell them she had gone somewhere with a man, surname unknown, first name Gus, or Louis, or Felix?

If you stand all day and handle sticky pies and cakes, you are tired when you come home to a crowded flat. But after you have had a cup of tea and a chop, and a bit of a wash-up, you feel better, and have a little time in which to remember that you are only twenty-seven—not "nearly thirty years old," as grandma said it.

Cynthia had reached that short-rested period. Victor had taken his glum self off. Jock and Andrew played on their block. That was the only restriction Cynthia had been able to impose. They played all sorts of games, with all kinds of children at unbelievable hours; but not off their block.

IT WAS only April, but it was hot. Summer had sent ahead some sample July weather. Cynthia pushed the damp hair from her forehead. She unfolded and made up the boys' bed in the dining-room, and opened the windows in Victor's room. She saw that Victor's room—it was the front room of the flat—was always shipshape. The rest of the flat, with its conglomeration of furniture, might fall to pieces; but Victor's room was always in order. Possibly she made a mistake. But she did need his money to help pay the rent, and he had no right to put her in the sacred budget under heading, "Cheap, but essential adjunct in bringing forth and up the house of Pomfret." At least that was the way she worded it in her defensive soliloquy.

It was April in Brooklyn, and still daylight. Cynthia was restless, so she went downstairs and sat on the doorstep—tucked herself in the corner, and watched the procession of the city go by.

A little inward voice cried out: "I do want to be happy. I'm not old enough to just want to get along." Sometimes it seemed to Cynthia that life—her busy working life—was whirling her along so fast that in some forgetful moment fate would whirl her past romance—not unkindly, but where there were so many girls, how was she to stop the machine of her hurrying days? If only she could wake up, could somehow release the Cynthia that was buried in her heart—perhaps that Cynthia could stay the flight of days long enough for happiness to catch up.

She looked at all the changing familiarity of her street—watched its humans—hated it, loved it—and knew that to leave it would be to have a dismal tug of homesickness in her heart.

She wanted to be happy. How had the world got the notion that she just wanted to be useful? If only she had somebody to talk to! Perhaps that would help her. Her heart felt chilled—for if she were going to be happy, something must happen soon.

A street piano, with mandolin attachment, was coming down the block. Cynthia leaned her head against the door casing, pushed her tired hair up, and thought about Jerry. Lank, honest Jerry—too soon having to play a man's part—a bit of a poet; but leaving them such a cruel surprise. Jerry had taken her to ball games, had shown her Wall Street on Sunday morning, and helped her discover Grace Court, when they wandered on the Heights. And he had promised to bring her a husband from France.

Cynthia's eyes closed. Who was going to bring her happiness now? Jerry had been so wise. He had known, without being told, that Cynthia wanted to be happy. Now Jerry stayed in France. No matter how many years came and went—how near she came to that terrible thirty—Jerry just stayed forever in France.

HER clenched hands relaxed. The street noises died away—died away into music. The clangor of it came into her sleep. Something sweet brushed her cheek. She opened her eyes and saw him—old grizzled son of Italy—passing his tin cup; and holding in his other hand the half-opened pink rose with which he had awakened her. He looked into her eyes. The hand holding the cup dropped to his side. He laid the rose in her lap. Cynthia shook her head, but he said softly, as if sharing with her a new-found secret: "Keep it, my dear. You have flower eyes—the rose will feel more at home with you." Then he hobbled after the piano, which was grinding out "Adieu to Naples" as it journeyed down the block. When Cynthia went to bed, the rose was in a clear crystal prison close at hand.

In the morning hurried dressing, a cup of coffee, a kiss to grandma; then a whiff of a spring day; then to be swallowed up in a wave of girls, only to be left high and dry behind the bakery counter—dreams, longings, and a full-blown pink rose left far away.

Tessie greeted her as they tied on their aprons, still smelling of the store laundry. Then the hot bread arrived. A new day, or just a standard day, commenced.

Tessie's waist was span-clean, and her vanity case had thrice done loyal service by eleven. The two men—the same two—came down the aisle, and passed.

Customers came singly, then bunched, then a crowd—nothing to mark the day; then the first bell, then the second, the pulling down of the weary hat on the tired hair, a little walk in the April day—then home.

After supper she slipped on the mussy bungalow dress, took Prince in her arm, and went on up to the roof. She sat on the coping. All sorts of odors breezed by—of spring, smoke from a chimney, the dead waters of the ferry slip. Prince wandered.

The wind rose. Cynthia thought it was like a moving-picture breeze—there was such a startling suddenness about it that it seemed faked. Then she saw the great cloud billows. There must be a storm coming. Cynthia had a true metropolitan's contempt for storms.

Of a sudden, something—it popped into her head that it looked like a patch from a pirate's black sail—came blowing over the roofs, dancing in the mood of the wind. First it was flat, then, buffeted by the whim of the gale, it whirled in merry shapes like an escaped dancing frock. She watched it coming. When it came near, the wind deserted it, and it came to rest at her feet.

She knelt by it. She looked at it closely before she touched it. It was purple, heavy silk; gold threads picked out great poppies and dwarf trees, and on the four corners were four gold tassels. She thought it might be Chinese, and it might be a table cover; but somehow it didn't belong in Brooklyn—it belonged in a story. She saw it on a table of black oak—crookedly across one end. There was a dagger on it, half escaping from its silver sheath, while on a high mantel a stone god watched through closed eyes. She picked up the silken intruder. Where had it come from?

For the first time she contemplated leaving her own roof. Not so much to find the owner of the tapestry; but to accept the challenge that adventure had dropped at her feet. Grandma would have said that the unaccounted-for pink rose had put silly notions in her head.

The wind, the on-coming storm excited her. Over two copings, much like her own, then a great expanse of roof that she knew was the top of a warehouse—more small roofs, up a short fire escape, and over an apartment house—still no sign of Oriental splendor. Dirt on her clothes—scratches on her arms. The wind swirled her dress about her, and tugged at loose ends of hair—all unnoticed. The brocade was spotless in her arms—in her heart a vague urge that she was finding a shorter route to the Orient—to the lands of color and delight.

Then she let herself down on the next roof. She stood motionless and saw things, inanimate things: a steamer chair; a low table with a pipe on it; a magazine, face downward on the roof (its location telling that an irate hand had chucked it); and by the chair what might be the top of a pair of crutches.

Cynthia studied it all, before she let her eyes rest on the man sitting in the chair. He was motionless—but how tall he must be when he stood up! The war must account for what she called "his disciplined chin." He was motionless, only his eyes giving back the ominous glare of the storm clouds. For an instant she had thought that his face was disfigured; then she saw that it was only the stormy light in his eyes that possessed his whole face.

Cynthia, standing, panting, her back against the wall which she had scrambled down, took it all in. She had been questing in the realm of high romance—but that one glance at his eyes had burned her dreams to cold ashes.

She tried to make some sound. It was not fair to look at him, when his guard was down. But all she could do was to lean against the wall—pity gripping her.

Then he saw her—and in a flash his guard was up. He stared at her for a minute before he spoke. A suspicion darted into her mind that he was using that minute to edit his thoughts.

"What the devil do you want?"

Cynthia, tired, begrimed, overwrought, laughed noiselessly, with trembling gasps for breath.

THE man stared at her—his anger almost beating back the dread in his eyes. He seemed to expect her to say something, but she couldn't speak. She was still trembling after she had got control of her mirthless laughter.

The man's wrath snapped into speech: "You can take yourself off, if you don't mind. I'm deuced indifferent why you came. Just go."

His scrutiny made her feel that he found her utterly contemptible. Afterward, when she laid her memories in order, she doubted—maybe there was something defensive about his bruskness. But now she felt strangely weak, and a blush—she could feel its crimsoning—covered her face. She leaned against the sun-warmed bricks at her back.

A Japanese valet came hurriedly from a high penthouse, evidently anxious to help his master indoors before the storm broke. The man jerked a thumb toward the silent Cynthia, and addressed the valet, "Behold, Ito, unknown, unbidden, and unwanted."

Then he spoke to her directly, "Get out."

His satiric tone found her seldom roused temper. She couldn't—she wouldn't explain, that she was too tired to climb back over the wall.

The man, his crutches helping, rose—his impotent legs bearing little of his weight. He started toward the penthouse. The valet, fluttering near, cast apologetic glances toward Cynthia.

The man spoke again: "Sorry we can't

converse. Your wit might give excuse for your nonexistent beauty."

Then she burst out. "I'm not hurting you any. I brought this back." She extended the brocade, as if its very richness had made it loathsome. "I"—anger held back her tears—"I dreamt I was finding a shorter route to the Orient, but I guess—I guess that I discovered America instead."

The man looked puzzled. The Jap, obviously expecting him to enter, held wide the door of the penthouse. The men vanished—a mighty hum telling her that they were going down in an elevator. Then, her knees deserting her, she sank down in a heap.

The storm was coming. It was there—the wall gave only a little shelter. The rain—a few big skirmishing drops in advance—came down, a veritable mass attack. In a minute she was wet through.

All her life it had pleased her that there were so many kinds of weather, but for a few minutes she admitted that she had enough of this particular kind. Her hair clung to her head in a wet mass. As the rearguard of the storm passed, her strength came back.

She began mentally to attack this man, who had ordered her off his roof like a stray dog. "I wasn't doing any harm." She gave silent vent to her grievances—they were more gusts of emotion than word statements: "He didn't need to speak to me like that. I wish I could hurt him—but I can't. That's the worst of me. I'm so insignificant that, no matter how hard I struck, he wouldn't feel it."

She gave the sodden brocade a kick. With tear-washed eyes she watched some laughing clouds scudding after their spent mother. Then she walked deliberately to the table and picked up his pipe, with an inward prayer that it was his favorite, and dropped it over the edge of the roof. Without a backward glance, she climbed wearily over the wall and went home.

She was glad that she managed to sneak into bed unseen. Sleep—heavy dreamless sleep—came to the refrain, "He didn't need to speak to me like that."

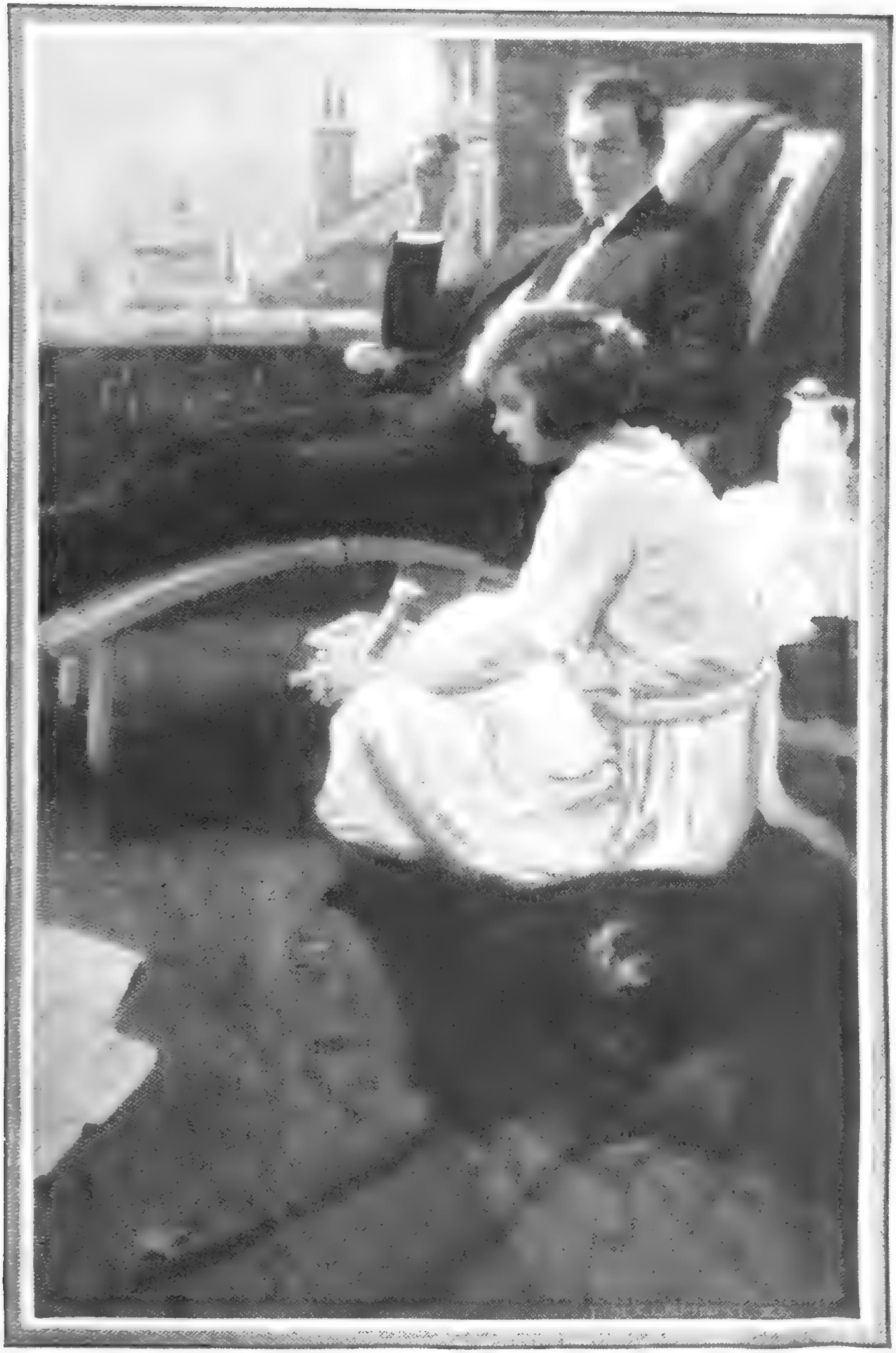
THURSDAY, the next day, was tame; no wild adventure, no rose. It was just one of the many days which, added together, were going to bring her all too swiftly to that terrible thirty.

Tessie was disturbed when word reached her that the style show was postponed for two weeks. She had it on her mind, and imparted bits of relevant information at most inopportune times. When Cynthia was head and shoulders in the big show case, rescuing, in an atmosphere of stale stickiness, truant currants and flakes of icing, she had to come forth to be informed that, if you were chosen to be a walking mannequin (don't receive the impression that Tessie used the word "mannequin"), you were given five dollars, and your pumps and silk stockings. When Cynthia was making mental strides toward telling a customer how much three and a half dozen Bath buns would be at twenty-nine cents a dozen, Tessie interjected the information—in a staccato whisper—that the beauty parlor dolled you up before you were incased in fashion's latest conceits.

Cynthia liked Tessie. Perhaps that was the reason she listened attentively. It was characteristic of Cynthia to listen closely—and talk little—all the time the deep blue of her eyes lending poetry to the other fellow's yarn. She was not only a good listener—she was a veritable temptation, a receiver of tales of family derangements and heart secrets. She did not want to know the other chap's hopes and fears, but the other chap was forever abandoning his hopes and fears on Cynthia's doorstep.

Sometimes, in wayward moments, her thoughts would dart back to the man on the roof. She was thinking of him, and felt almost ashamed, when Tessie was describing her latest excursion with Dan. Other revelations regarding Dan had put Cynthia in possession of the facts—that he was an electrician at nine dollars a day, hoping soon to be his own boss, masterful, red-headed, and twenty-eight. A fine age to complement Tessie's nineteen. Cynthia thought that if she were Tessie, and nineteen, and desired of Dan, life would be as well rounded as an orange. But Tessie said she was not going to be easy; other men, other years—you know.

Victor pressed his suit. (Both meanings are correct.) Cynthia dodged, but came up hard against grandma's arguments in favor of his wooing: "You don't expect to do any better, do you? You're most thirty—you better not wait much longer, or you'll be stuck in a store all your life. I guess Victor



"Well, Miss Cynthia Peyton, just answer me one question: Are you inclined to dream of a knight, with your glove a token in his helmet?"

would help me and the boys to go back to Meade Springs."

Some nights Cynthia sought refuge in the public library—Schermerhorn Street branch—and lived for an hour or two in other folks' houses. Houses pictured in some of those cruel and inhuman magazines that show country homes—real homes with attics, and cellars, and porches, and gardens. Often in early spring the farmer blood in Cynthia cried out to go where new grass was springing, and where last year's autumn leaves, like ghosts caught out at sunrise, whirled in merry flight.

Then one night—just casually—she went up on the roof. By way of varying the evening's pleasure, there was a choice of the roof, the doorstep, or the library; and now it seemed wise that Prince should have another airing: it being patent that the fire escape might pall on him.

SHE had on the clean bungalow dress. For an hour she sat on her own roof; then she walked slowly—by no means intending to go far—loitering, gazing right and left, taking note of the multitude of roofs, and the satisfying expanse of sky, but peering at last over the edge of a certain roof to see if possibly there was a lounging figure in a steamer chair—then to be startled by a voice saying, "Hello, stranger!"

It was two words, but if you recall that we said Cynthia was a good listener, you know that she heard a great deal in those two words. He remembered her. He hailed her in a "comrade" tone, and there was a welcoming inflection.

She blushed, was afraid afterward that she smiled, liked the shape of his close-cropped head; and was glad that his eyes had lost their haunted look. She sat on the high coping, and tried to convey by a studied rigidity of face her complete unconcern. Needless to say, her lower lip—not that it in the least quivered—somewhat belied the coldness in her eyes. She must be sure to remember that she was angry at him. She wondered if she looked as dowdy as she felt.

When he spoke she knew that he suspected her timidity: "Come on down. It's rot to be afraid of me. I'm only—half a man." There was a motion of his hand toward his quiescent legs—just a wave of his man's hand; but she knew it blotted out his world—his old world. Bitterness toned the richness of his voice. "Would you mind coming over and balling me out a bit? I'm so blank sick of being coddled."

Cynthia said, with a quick intake of breath, as if her words expressed but a remnant of her crowding thoughts: "I didn't know you were a cripple. I thought that you were sick—had been—I mean nervously sick. I mean"—her tongue stumbled badly—"I mean I thought it was temporary—your being sick——"

Why wouldn't he help her out? Couldn't he see that she was a tired woman of twenty-seven? Did he mistake her for a timid girl?

She was fearful about liking his smile, when he said: "I am honored that you prefer cripples—at least I infer that you prefer cripples to nervous invalids."

The man was pelting questions at her. At the same time he tossed a big cushion, a near relative of the brocade, on the roof for her to sit on. Cynthia sat on it, but not before she had carried it farther from his chair; and then she tucked her feet out of sight, and tucked the blowing wisps of hair behind her ears, which gave her a meek look; and tried to absorb his questions:

"How did you happen to trail that table-cover across the roofs? That fool of a Jap ought to have known it would blow away. Do you live near here? What nonsense were you talking about discovering America? In any case I'm glad to be discovered. Give an account of yourself. No explorer could be as insignificant as you manage to look."

He was silent for a minute, then he snapped out—apparently thinking it fair that he should give a fact or two in exchange for her answers: "I'm Thomas Agnew Darrow, one-time surgeon—avocation, sketching my fellow men, particularly along the water-front, when they are watching the iridescent oil on the dead waters of the ferry slips. . . . Maybe you have heard of the war. . . . So now I'm just Tom Darrow—damaged. Tell me about your chapter—mine's done."

Cynthia, vague memories of having read of him in the papers coming to mind, had to hold her peace.

Suddenly his bitterness, perhaps at sight of that same lower lip, escaped in a sardonic laugh: "Don't look so down-hearted. You won't find the shell splinter, even if you do keep your eyes fastened on the roof. It took its departure long ago. I've already permitted my one-time colleagues to have their way with me three times."

Was that a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth—a smile that did not reach his eyes at all? Cynthia was frightened, for the look of dread, that had held its own even against his anger at their first encounter, was striving to come back.

He hurried on—by his economy of words he gave the impression that he was trying to spare her—possibly himself. "Now my case is in the foreground again. They want to operate again."

"Oh, don't let them!" Cynthia's cry startled them both.

Then he asked—the deadness of his voice chilling her: "How can it concern you?"

She could not look at him, and he could scarcely hear her answer, "You might die."

They were still. The breeze played with the smoke from his cigarette.

"No." There was a lack of spirit in his speaking, "That's where you are mistaken. I have no such lucky chance. I might not die—and I might not be cured. In fact I have been given to understand that there are about four chances in five that another operation will leave me decidedly worse off."

Perhaps Cynthia's silence provoked him to continue. Odd that he should want to defend himself to her. "Let me assure you that if with that leap I could be sure of bridging the chasm 'twixt two worlds, I'd jump off. Here a 'twixter fate steps in—I might not die—I would just be bedridden, and—and fussy." He added the last word, to relieve the grieved tension in her face.

There was an apologetic flavor in his next words. "I had heard my latest sentence only a half-hour before our first encounter. I don't always serve my wrath ungarnished—sometimes I add a bit of cress or a slice of lemon."

She could have no misgivings about liking that smile, but she almost wished that there had been a fashionable beauty there to receive it.

Then he went on in his habitual tone of half-concealed satire: "Come, this won't do. I wonder what the devil makes me tell you so much. Tell me about yourself. Answer a few of my questions."

So Cynthia told him: "My name is Cynthia Peyton. I'm twenty-seven. I live with my family in a flat back there." Her inclusive wave of the hand took in the larger half of New York's largest borough. "The wind carried the brocade to my feet, and I was trying to find the owner." Then shyness overcame her.

But he laughed. It was a successful laugh, even if instinct told you that he was sadly out of practise. "Well, Miss Cynthia Peyton of the flat back there, you can keep a lot of information to yourself. Just answer me one more question: Are you inclined to dream of a knight, with your glove a token in his helmet, bringing love and jewels to lay at your feet? Are you? I mean, generally speaking."

Cynthia, alarm in her eyes, started to retreat.

Then he said, "Generally speaking, friend Cynthia, yes or no."

Cynthia said, "Yes."

"Well, now"—there was still a note of amusement in his voice, almost a note of derision—"we can start fair. Our characters dovetail nicely; for I am different—hopelessly unromantic. I'd even trained to specialize in diseases below the diaphragm. So come, tell me more about yourself. You see I'm safe—sort of safety personified."

SO CYNTHIA, pathetically unassuming, told him more about herself—not all by words; some of it by what she left unsaid, by tightly clenched hands, by a sudden upward glance or swiftly lowered lids.

He made scarcely any comment, but he did say: "The old chap was right. You have flower eyes—they are like the key to a locked garden."

It was what she left unsaid about Victor Pomfret that made him exclaim, "Don't let them get you down, Cynthia!"

He wanted her to come and talk with him every evening, but she could not do that. She managed to come twice in the next two weeks. He fumed that she was niggardly. Though he never professed any admiration for her looks, and she was convinced that she appeared to him as dowdy and insignificant, he never appeared bored by her talk or her silence, and her bookish likes and dislikes entertained him—they were so much her own. It was his fear of losing her visits entirely that made him rein his temper, when she firmly refused to share one of Ito's perfectly served meals.

Once he showed her a small box where, in jeweler's cotton, reposed the fragments of his pipe. Cynthia said she was sorry, but the man—she still called him "the man" in her heart—chuckled, and urged her to admire what he called an amber god amid the relics of his charred temple.

On the second of her visits she told him in a sort of dead voice, as though the fire had burned out of the event, about Sarah. Sarah, Jerry's wife, married to him at camp—unheard of by the rest of his family, until she claimed the insurance money.

When she finished, he started to give his thoughts the habiliments of fitting speech. Then he saw that he could not damn the woman without touching Jerry; and to touch Jerry unkindly was to hurt Cynthia. He did start to lay his hand on her shoulder in sympathy—but his courage failed.

The meetings on the roof, the talks with Dr. Darrow, so little time ago a stranger, opened the kingdom of heaven to Cynthia—a heaven that bore a striking resemblance to a new earth. It was a meeting of equals, willing to disagree on all sorts of subjects—to quarrel, with assumed bombast on his part, and shy terror on hers.

The days in the store were much the same—soothing Tessie's impatience as the time for the style show drew nearer. Trying to be generous enough to forgo Tessie's help without a murmur—buying a new white waist for one dollar ninety-eight: and taking cold when she went to a movie with Victor. All through the first reel he told her of his budget—once he said "our budget," but corrected himself, not as if it mattered; but to Cynthia, who was living in the days of Mary Tudor, talk of a budget was like pigeonholing romance.

IT WAS during their fourth meeting that she saw Dr. Darrow looking at her with eyes frankly quizzical, as if he were endeavoring to find an answer to some perplexing problem. Finally he ejaculated, with a breath of relief: "Why, Cynthia! It's just poverty that ails you, isn't it?"

She murmured, "Yes, I guess you're right." She had no idea where his query led.

When he spoke his voice held an element of finality: "Well, as money happens to be my long suit, we'll soon remedy that—no more skimping, or worry, or store, or Pomfret. Heigh-ho! Shy lady, what will you have first?"

Then terror seized Cynthia, and her voice quivered when she said, "But I can't take your money."

The doctor's eyes, first puzzled, then darting sparks, bored into hers.

She knew that he saw a plain, tired, youngish person, who happened—not that it mattered—to be of the feminine sex. Even to prevent the torrent of his anger from flooding over her, she could not say another word, only, "I can't take your money."

When his ire was subsiding, he said: "You seem to forget that I told you that I was only half a man, but, if a parson saying a few words over us will put you at ease, why, we'll have a parson say them. But kindly bear in mind that all you will get from your bargain is my money, and an occasional segment of first-grade temper."

After sitting for some seconds, wide-eyed and incredulous, she managed to ask, "But what do I give to you, sir?"

He started. "You will drop that 'sir' for Tom." His smile was encouraging. "All you have to promise me—and no mental reservations here—is to spend my money and receive the buffets of my wrath."

Cynthia, wordless after a low-spoken, "I'll have to think it over," climbed back over the coping, and went slowly home.

All that night she did not dare to let herself think—to let unanswerable questions come to life in her heart.

She was thankful that business was rushing. She was even reconciled to nearly "working her head off" if Tessie should be chosen for the style show. It was after eleven, when the same two men came down the aisle. They came toward the counter, where Tessie stood palpitant, and Cynthia sold buns. They stopped in front of the counter.

One of them spoke to Cynthia. "Would you be willing to act as a model in a fashion parade? You have probably heard that we are having one this afternoon." More details. To Cynthia's astounded ears his words became a hopeless jumble.

She turned to Tessie, as though imploring that assured damsel to right the man's obvious mistake. But Tessie, good sport, snatched off Cynthia's apron, and gave her a violent shove in the right direction, with the snapped injunction, "Go on, you little fool!" She left her no choice but to follow the two men.

First she was given lunch in a far corner of the restaurant. There were some girls at the same table giving vent to excited chattering, so Cynthia had no time for private thinking. After lunch she was handed over to Madame Floy, of the beauty parlor.

More than once, during the next two hours, Cynthia would have fled from these white-robed manipulators of her person, but at crucial moments Tessie's words, "Go on, you little fool!" made her stay submissive. Only once, and then it was already too late, did she actually start to retreat.

It was when she sat, swathed in white, before the long mirror—her freshly shampooed hair, fluffed and showing the charm of its natural curl, was spread fanlike over her shoulders. She had hated the shampooing, with its cap of suds, the helpless feeling when the chair was unexpectedly tilted back for the rinsing—then the drying, and combing; and now it lay, a really compensating mass of loveliness, over her shoulders.

The hair-dresser left her alone. Perhaps it was to give Cynthia time to admire the beauty of her handiwork. Cynthia was remembering that her mother had combed her hair like that when she was a tiny girl. She had reached the point of feeling sorry for her little self, when the hair-dresser came back, and with her a man, white-coated and sleek, evidently another satellite of the goddess of beauty. But Cynthia, having thoughts of her childhood in mind, was unobservant. The hair-dresser gave a word or two of instruction to the man, then vanished.

Cynthia, unsuspicious, surmised that her finished coiffure was to be the work of this man, who looked French. He eyed her with puckered brows, as if trying to visualize her appearance when his work was finished. Then he took up his comb. First he parted off great strands of hair, and let them fall in a cascade in front of her face. She admired the hair, with its brown-gold lights, as it rippled in front of her eyes. Then he took firm hold of her head, and bent it down. She wondered what that was for. Near her right ear she felt something cold and tickling, and it traveled quickly across the back of her neck—a cold touch, then a click—then another cold touch and a click, and then something tickled near her left ear. And she wondered. But it wasn't until he took his hand from her head—and it felt lighter—that the devastating truth came home to Cynthia; and she knew that this man was a barber—and that he was cutting off her hair.

SHE felt sick, and a pitiful faintness made her unable to protest. Her icy hands gripped the arms of the high chair where she felt so helpless. The cascade of hair—her very own hair—she wanted this man to understand, and she would impress that fact on him in a minute, still rippled down before her eyes. Perhaps, if carefully arranged, it could be made to cover the short ends at the back. Cynthia was just on the point of voicing her angry protests, when the shears clicked. They were horribly sharp. They pressed against her temple, then across her forehead—and the shining cascade lay in a little heap on the white cloth in front of her. Cynthia could not bear to look at it a second time. She could not bear to give even a glance in the big mirror—could only sit with closed eyes. Tessie's command, "Go on, you little fool!" was the sole reason she held back the tears.

She was passive—protests now availing nothing, while a final trimming went on. She made no resistance, when the barber, who appeared unaware of the havoc he had wrought to her feelings, as well as to her tresses, bent her head from side to side, and trimmed, and snipped and clipped.

He had turned the chair to secure a better light, so that she no longer faced her blighted self in the mirror. He was painstaking, and eyed his craftsmanship with your true artist's frown. He cut infinitesimal bits from what was a small bang—he enticed a short curling lock to twine with careless grace about her left ear.

Cynthia's neck ached, and she felt, oh, so tired! How could Tessie have looked forward to any of this? After more wearying minutes the barber put down his shears, doused some clean-smelling liquid on her hair, rubbed it vigorously, then combed it with delicate final touches. Cynthia was passive. Since realizing what the clicking shears had wrought, she had been held by a nothing-more-to-lose sensation. Then the barber laid down his comb, and turned the

Everybody's Magazine, January 1924

chair to face the mirror. Cynthia wanted to look anywhere but at her own reflection. She wanted to hide. She felt that criminals must really prefer solitary confinement.

Then she happened to look at the barber's face. Satisfaction with his artistry glowed in his smile. He must consider his achievement perfect. For his sake she looked in the mirror—and she saw the new Cynthia.

The barber's words were scarcely comprehended. "Zee! Instead of the good girl—the bad pretty boy."

And he was right. The real Cynthia had come out of her shell. When it dawned upon her, she gave a merry tinkle of a laugh. Some memory of seeing the head of a Greek god on a gold chain came to her—it was an old coin made when the world was young.

The barber—she felt a warm glow of gratitude toward him—displayed the fine touches of his handiwork; the ears, just a bit revealed, the clustering curls caressing the slim neck, the wave of a parting on the side that gave that suggestion of a mischievous boy. Then he let her go.

CYNTHIA was alive. She was awake to the tip ends of her smallest fingers.

She posed in a "sixteen" pink taffeta. She paraded. She stepped up on the platform, her eyes roving over the heads of the staring shoppers. Young, beautiful, for two hours a complete success. No yesterdays—no to-morrows—just a perfect now. That was Cynthia, thanks to a barber, and Tessie; and somehow she felt that she owed thanks to an old man and a rose. For she felt it was the rose that had started the chain of happenings that had landed her here in pink taffeta—every detail perfected—to gaze over the heads of admiring women who flattered themselves that with small effort they could duplicate Cynthia. What fools they were!

During the rests between posings, Cynthia gathered wisdom at the feet of Miss Jane Onderdonk. Miss Jane was a professional model, with no beauty of face, but owning a flat back, a high arch, and the knack of strolling as if she had refused two millionaires that morning. Cynthia never saw her again, but she always remembered her bit of advice, "Remember that there is no virtue in being out of style."

After the pink taffeta there was a bridesmaid's dress, china shepherdess model, pastel shades, big hat flopping down on one side from the weight of a great bunch of sweet peas. Then there was a sport suit of rough tweed, severely plain, straight lines—a tailored waist peeped out at throat and wrists. It was a provoking suit, trying to make Cynthia a little mouse again, but not accomplishing it—just making it impossible to keep your gaze from the trying-to-look-demure face of Cynthia. The show was over the first day.

Cynthia slipped back into her own cheap suit, carried her hat in her hand, and went home, her feet hardly touching the pavement—not even embarrassed when grandma and Mazzie and the boys gave excited vent to their surprise at first sight of her short hair—telling them nothing of the ordeal; just a careless, "Oh, I took a notion to have it cut." What are lies for? Not letting them touch it, but letting them come slowly by the knowledge that Cynthia had found herself in the clicking of a pair of shears.

After supper she put on her blue linen—last summer's best—and walked, with now and then a little run, across the roofs. Surely some one would be glad to hear the tale of her adventures. Surely he would praise her.

For a minute his expression reminded her of the barber, when he had completed his task—it was as if he were beholding something strangely perfect. When Victor was near, all her dream men rushed to her defense; now they, who were only the ghosts of shadows, retreated into nothingness, for this man was alive; and the look that grew in his eyes must be meant for her, for there was no other woman there to claim it.

She talked to him—she did most of the talking, for the first time wholly at her ease. But when Cynthia, sitting on the big cushion, this time close to his chair, felt his hand laid lightly on her head, it was as if in blessing; and when she told him about "the pretty boy," he said, half to himself, "I wonder—I wonder what kind of brute I am."

It was when she was going, and had almost reached the wall, that he called her back. And when she came and stood near him, he said: "Come nearer. You'll have to come all the way this time." And when she stepped close beside him, he drew her to him; and for long weary days she held the memory of his kisses, and the terrible pressure of his arms. Then he pushed her away. When she saw his face, she could not bear to look a second time, for in an instant the ghosts of horror had roused, and possessed him again. And his words, "Just go," bore all the angry protest of their first meeting.

She started home, the resplendent flare of the sunset at her back; she saw Victor standing by a tall chimney, a fine object to sneak behind—saw him and for an instant her old timid self struggled to come to life. But the new Cynthia held her own, and looked at Victor—looked through him, not letting him blot out the least glory of the sunset, which she turned to face. His questions buzzed about her: "Why do you come up here at night? Don't you know that rich guys like that don't mean any good to poor girls? Who is the man, anyhow?" She tried to brush his voice away. "You better marry me, and let me protect you."

She felt chilled—maybe it was the night air. She walked homeward. It was hard to make her silly feet climb the copings. Victor insisted on helping her. If only he would keep his hands off. She scarcely comprehended, when he asked her to marry him. All the time a question—a darting flame of question—burned in her heart. Had the man who had just loosed the ghosts in his eyes asked her to marry him, or was that a faded speech like a dead pink rose?

She brushed aside the nagging of Victor's proposal. No, not to-morrow, or next week, or next year would she marry him. Yes, she knew he had it all figured out—where and how they would live. But she must be careful—strange that thought still haunted her—and not make Victor angry, and thereby relinquish his weekly contribution toward the rent, paid in ones every Friday at seven. Always the same time, always ones—both time and denomination of his choosing.

She was not expected to work at the bakery counter during the style show, but she happened to meet Tessie on the stairs. Tessie was critical; no doubt she did not want Cynthia to become conceited. "It's nothing to have your hair bobbed"—only Tessie knew it was not bobbed; it was trimmed to fit the new Cynthia. "Lots of girls have it done. Anyhow, they say it's going out."

Cynthia said quietly, disarmingly: "I know lots of girls have their hair cut. But I guess it's like marriage—it has happened lots of times to other folks, but it's only thrilling when it happens to yourself."

There were two more days of the fashion show. On the last night, Cynthia, as per information long ago imparted by the gallant Tessie, carried home her pumps and silk stockings, and five dollars.

But to Cynthia the style show had become a haze of staring eyes and gabbling tongues.

For when she went night after night to find the man who had laid his hand so lightly on her hair, there was no man there—there was nothing there at all. Almost it seemed that a meticulous Jap had dusted the last vestige of life away, for not even a cigarette ash remained to tell that a man and a girl, who looked like a king's page, had lived there during the going down of the old familiar light of day.

AT THE end of the week Victor left. He said he meant to bring her to reason. All Cynthia noticed was that he finished out his week—the sacred budget making no provision for unrequited love.

How was she going to pay the rent and still eat? Grandma's voice rose to a despairing cackle. Cynthia did not know how she was going to pay the rent. Once, in the middle of the night, she rose and faced the stars, and asked God not to let her become wholly indifferent whether the rent was paid or not, for she knew that was the danger. She had no power left to worry about rent. She did not go any more to the roof. She did not even try to identify his house in the row of brownstone similarities of which it must be one. She felt that she had nothing to do with the front of his house—it did not concern her whether you told it by some newly installed vestibule doors, or it might be the one with the untouched old-time air—black and white tiles, very clean, and silver knobs, very bright. She thought she would prefer it to be the house of the silver knobs, but she made no effort to find out.

It had turned cold—the wind felt as if it had blown over fields of rotting ice.

When the rent was due, Mazzie helped

pay it—no comment on her past delinquencies, only: "Now that you have sent that snip, Pomfret, about his business, I don't mind doing my share." All of which struck Cynthia as queer—and then, when she thought it over, it did not strike her as queer at all.

The only cheering point in the days that followed was that she learned to know Mazzie better—learned that Mazzie had no illusions about the men she went with: "But then, it's that sort of men for me, or none; maybe they're cheap, but I just take them 'as is.'"

Cynthia was woman enough to understand. But for herself it must be the one man—even if now he were only a dream of happy evenings.

Days passed. She was busy all the time. Only in that lull after supper, when the city was adjusting itself for the dark, tuning up for its night of pleasure, would she sit quietly on the doorstep and watch the people coming, going, hastening somewhere, nowhere: and all the time a tired hope filled her to lose herself in the crowd, and let it drift her where it would. She tried so hard to hold her thoughts from the man—her man for a few evenings, but gone, silent, shut away by his own choosing. Why couldn't she be too proud to care for him, now that he gave no sign of needing her? He need not have been afraid to tell her that he no longer wanted to marry her.

The same street piano came by, the same man grinding; but a boy passed the cup—no old man, no rose. She sat still until late, the street emptying slowly. The Smith Street cars carried fewer people toward Coney Island, carried more and more homeward—fathers, mothers, children, pails of sand. They had forgotten, careless folks, to bring home the ocean. She had been like that herself, bringing home a pail of sand, when she should have brought the sea. Perhaps, if she sat there long enough, sleep would come quickly, and deaden the night.

There was only one help that came to her at night. Mazzie must always be touching her. No matter how near she lay to the edge of the bed, or how silently the sobs shook her, no matter how sound asleep Mazzie seemed to be—always Mazzie had a hand touching her, touching her gently, as if afraid of hurting.

Then another Wednesday, that midway point between the bargain rush of Monday and the something-for-Sunday-night-supper crowd of Saturday, she came home by way of Borough Hall Park. The stiff leaves of the tulips were such a new green. There was no reason to hurry home.

But when she came to her own doorway, there was Ito, immaculate, wordless, beaming, holding out to her a letter—departing, his smile intact, before it occurred to her to look at the letter. She sat down, not suddenly, but with studied ease, trying to assure herself that she did not feel faint.

There was her name, Miss Cynthia Peyton, on the envelope. For seconds she held the note, then she read it—then she understood. There was only a paragraph signed by a nurse.

> Dr. Darrow wishes you to know that the operation, to which he submitted four weeks ago, has been successful. OLIVE JACOBS, R. N.

The street became still. The kind darkness covered all unloveliness. The tang of the sea came in the breeze. When Mazzie and Louis came home they found her sitting there. Louis quite fancied her—she spoke in such a quiet way, and gave him a firm small hand in greeting. How was Louis to mistrust that Cynthia was swinging joyfully on the gate of heaven?

The next day she worked as usual. She even arranged the French puffs and napoleons so attractively that they were all sold by three o'clock.

When she came home—loitering—hoping that summer would hurry and catch the joy of her mood, grandma gave her a note. "A fancy little Jap left it."

Cynthia had never seen his writing, but she knew this note was not secondhand, for the address was: "Miss Cynthia Peyton of the Flat Back-there."

No man, no matter how weak, could dictate a greeting like that. Inside, it was short—the last words a bit wabbly:

> Dear Boy: Why don't you come to see me?
> TOM.

After supper, after the dishes were done, she put on the blue linen, and walked past the brownstone houses. How did he expect her to know where he lived? Why, hanging to the silver knob was a wonderful pink rose.

The Jungle-Thing

Grim, Powerful Is This Picture of a Man Who Found Himself Possessed of Strange Traits That Terrified His Associates

By Eugene Cunningham

GOOD day, señor! You are the American, the Señor Barnabas? I am a man of Puntarenas; of Puntarenas, that is, if of any town, for my days are spent in the jungles, as logger in a dye-wood camp.

My name? Why, if the señor pleases, he speaks now to Gato Viejo, the "old wildcat." So my mother called me, but the nickname may well seem odd to you, for I have of years only twenty-four and my temper—unless men provoke me *very* much—is peaceful to gentleness.

But I come not to gossip, señor. In the town it is told me that you have seen all you care to see in Costa Rica; that soon do you go north to search for other ruins of those whom we of Mayan strain call "The Predecessors." That you go very far north; even to Guatemala. That you make no stay in the towns, but push on and on; past Coban; past Sácluk. It is said that you will plunge into those deep wildernesses, cross the great plains, of Peten the Mysterious, land of my mother's ancient race.

The señor does well! From my mother I know that in the mighty jungles along the rivers Usu-mat-sínt-la and Cán-ku-en are the remains of cities of the Mayas old when Hernan Cortez's farthest ancestor was not yet born! Hearing of these things, I have come—I, Gato Viejo, son of a Mayan mother and a Spanish father, to ask that you take me with you to the old places—to Peten.

Why does the señor look surprised? He has heard of Gato? That may well be, though for two months past I have worked in the dye-wood cuttings miles from Puntarenas. The señor has heard that my marriage-feast will soon be spread? He has seen—her, Yrena Sanchez, who comes soon to Gato's house for all time?

Right, señor! That is very true! Having seen her, you could say no less. In all Puntarenas Yrena would find not one woman fit to stoop and touch her tiny bare foot! As you say, she is marvelously beautiful. The señor is a wise man! Beauty without must be matched by beauty within. But Yrena is as sweet and kindly of heart as ever woman was. You smile? Perhaps every man thinks the same of his beloved, but I tell you that in all the world is no woman save Yrena in whose rounded arms I care to lie. No woman but Yrena for Gato Viejo; he loves but once and then to the death—or past it.

I thought that would be your question. Why, when my wedding-day awaits me, should I be asking to go with you into that far, strange land, Peten; where in the jungles serpents, wild beasts, wilder men, all await the venturer; where in the streams lurk the famished alligators? But, señor, is it not enough that I do ask?

Bethink you! It will be good for you to have me with you. In the streets of towns Gato Viejo is a stupid fellow; he stammers when some one speaks to him; he knows hardly where to turn; he is like an awkward bull blundered into a tiny hut. He walks with eyes cast down and held squintingly—have you not seen me? But on a jungle trail, señor, he is such a woodsman as few

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can hope to be. For the jungle is his house; the green tree-tops his roof. Every sound has its meaning; he understands the speech of the beasts and fears none, not even the most savage. He— Señor, have you heard nothing more of Gato than that he marries? Nothing?

Very well! If the señor sets that as the price of his employment, will take no other pay than my true reason for asking to go with him, then I must meet his terms. Thank you, señor, but I never sit like other men. Let me squat here upon the ground below the veranda; planking beneath my feet irks me. Now, I will tell you something of my thoughts of wedlock:

MARRIAGE is more for women than for men; more for them because more to them. A woman says: "—And so she was married!" With that, the tale is told, except, perhaps, for the number of the children. For a woman—to a woman—once married is settled for always. But to a man, the case is very different. He says: "I will marry, and then I will do thus and so." Mark the difference! Except for the little ones to come, there is no "—and then—" to follow for the woman.

You smile! I read your thoughts and—Señor, one must agree with what the people say: You are a wise man. Your eyes say to me: "Something lies behind that remark. You tell not all. If I permitted, you would put me off with those half explanations which are no explanations at all."

Very well; I evade no longer. Now begins the true tale. Lean forward, señor! As I throw back my head, lifting high the upper lids, look you straight into my eyes. You see! That little sucking noise in your throat tells me that. What do you see? Señor, your eyes are like other men's. You really saw that which you think you saw. Dimly white, as if painted upon each eye, you saw the image of an angry cat, back arched; could almost hear it snarl! So has every other man described it. You heard nothing more of me than that soon I marry? Señor, are you *very* sure? Oh, I believe you, but— It is strange that some one has not told you.

Now, look steadily at the pocket of my old coat. Oh, either one will do; they are the same. Stare steadily, señor; steadily; else you may think the sun dazzles you. Ah! You see the squirming of the fabric; surely, you think, never did innocent cotton cloth swell and shrink like that! You are right, señor; there is something in my pockets. One glimpse and the skin of your back would crawl as if an icy hand touched you. Ah! The señor has guessed.

They are—my friends. Each two feet of quick grace; each as thick as—that stick yonder, which you eye longingly. Do not pick it up! I, Marcos Gabriel, called Gato Viejo; I, who am not like other men in—in here; I promise you that there is nothing to fear. True, they are two tobobas, deadliest-fanged serpents of Costa Rica. But they might have been the harmless massacuata; all one to Gato! Why do I carry them? Oh, I smelled them far off from the trail as I came into town, so I went into the jungle, picked them up and brought them in. Almost always I have a snake or two in my pockets.

My mother, señor, as I have told you, was a woman of the Mayas, without drop of other blood. A wise woman, señor; sometimes, I recall, I feared her a little. My father, who was a Spaniard of Seville, something of a poet, he feared her also, sometimes, for all that they loved each other. He said to her at times that had she lived in Old Spain in the days of the Inquisition, the priests would have burned her for unholy powers.

They were poor, very poor, my father and my mother. While she carried me beneath her heart, they lived in a tiny hut far out in the jungle; there was a clearing large enough for one to move about the hut-walls, a patch of plantains for their food, but all else was jungle as you know it; green, silent, a world in itself, with its own people like any other world. Jaguars and leones and wildcats screamed near by in the black nights; serpents of all kinds crept along the trail that led to the nearest village. My father and mother met them, often; and sometimes the javalis—the wild pigs—and the deer would walk upon the trail, also.

A few weeks before I was born, my mother went one day into the jungle to gather certain plants. Lying across the trail she saw a log and coming closer she could see where it had rolled down a little bank above the trail. She saw, too, that it had caught beneath it a great toboba. Now, most women would have screeched and run away; else hunted a stick with which to beat to death that toboba. But my mother was not like other women. I have heard her talk as to another, when all about her *I* could see nothing. So now she got a stick, but not to hammer into pulp the toboba. No!

Underneath the log she thrust it, and lifted the log a trifle so that the serpent might wriggle from beneath. Señor, you are not of our people; in your head you are different. You may only laugh at me, but——

My mother said, and I believe her, that the great toboba crawled slowly from under the log—then turned and lifted its head. For so long a time as it takes to snap one's fingers thrice, it stared at her. Then he—it, I mean—slipped into the jungle. My mother went on to gather her plants, leaving the trail after a time. Deep in the jungle she heard snarling, after a little. Softly she went toward it, being a woman not easily frightened. In a little open space she saw two wildcats, upon the fresh-killed carcass of a deer. She squatted down to watch them; they, after turning yellow eyes upon her for a moment, went on eating and snarling—which is not like Señor Gato!

Well, I was born. Soon I began to play about the hut. My mother laid a thick log across the doorway to keep me from crawling outside. But one day, when she was gathering plantains in the patch behind the hut, I wriggled over the log, being a strong child. She came in and called me; then hurried out to hunt for me. She found me sitting in the trail and beyond me, not more than ten paces, señor, lying upon the sunny earth like some tame creature, purring, licking its thick paws, was a she-wildcat.

This was surprising, but with her first glance at me my mother forgot the cat. For in each hand, señor, I held a toboba by the middle of its body. I talked to them, she said, with chucklings and gruntings, and they swayed their wicked heads as if they understood!

After that I was more often in the jungle than in the hut. Short of tying me hand and foot, there was no keeping me indoors. My father was troubled—he died when I was eight—but my mother said calmly that I was such as might be seen once in a hundred years; to me was open all the wilderness, without fear. It and not a man-made rooftree was my house. The wild things were my toys, my playfellows. Into the hut I would bring little animals, snakes of all sorts, harmless or venomous; and so long as I was near the most deadly would harm nobody. When I went out— Well, that was another matter. My mother stepped carefully into dark corners, always.

Until I was a man in years and rather more than most men in strength of body, we lived in that hut, my mother and I. Few came our way; I had no thought that other men were not just as I was. Then my mother died, having told me much of the Predecessors, her people, taught me the Mayan tongue. I came down to the timber-cuttings and found work that I liked in the logging.

My tale is wearisome? I am glad that you do not find it so; all this I had to say before I might hope to make you understand the rest of what I must tell you—since you will not hire me without explanation of my eagerness to depart from the place where my bride is.

Among the timber-cutters and the American señores who employed them, I learned how I differed from other men. They squealed and ran about like mad things if one harmless little snake should be found coiled among the logs which they were moving. If I picked it up and took it carefully to the jungle-edge and loosed it there, they squealed yet more loudly. If I trotted beside the stirrup of the American boss-señor as we went to search for new timber; if then I stopped him to say that in the jungle to right or left was this or that serpent sleeping or hunting; why, señor, that boss-señor would stare at me as—as you do now! It seemed strange to him.

WHEN we were paid each month for our work, the timber-cutters would hurry back to Puntarenas usually, there to drink and dance with their girls. At first, for all that they asked me often, I would not leave the cutting. My money was held by the paymaster and month by month it swelled to a greater sum. Money! Why, what use was it to me? But the other cutters, seeing how much I might draw out to spend if I liked, for drinking and dancing in which they would share, they began to urge me more and more. They said that no man was a man, until he had learned to drink the fiery white *guaro,* had felt within the hollow of his arm a woman's yielding waist.

"I care not," I would laugh. "You speak of these things; you, Juan, Antonio, Pedro. As you speak and think of them, your eyes burn as if already you had them. But look into my eyes! They are calm and cool; I laugh. For the drink and the women your colones will buy, I would give not one centavo!"

Then would they laugh at me—though none would ever look me straight in the eyes more than once. They jeered, calling me a very tame cat, a gatillo, a little cat. They said that it was plain I could not call myself a whole man, whatever my height, since I cared nothing for the things they held most precious. "Jungle-thing" they called me; with other names which I do not care to say. Always I would smile, for their foolish talking troubled me not at all. Also, I stayed at the cutting, or wandered alone in the jungle. Then . . .

It may have been the time of year that did it; I cannot say. But one night, after the cutters had all taken their colones and hurried off to town, I lay beside a hut and as I stared up into the blackness, counting the yellow stars by tens of tens as often I do, something strange entered into me. And it came to me that the cutters had been right; man was not meant to go always by himself; it *was* good to drink the fiery *guaro;* to feel within the strong arm-bend a soft, warm waist; to dance and drink and laugh the night away.

DOWN to the town I came and found the cutters in a big hut; drinking, dancing. Inside the door I strode and they laughed much to see the wild jungle-thing mingling with men. Some one gave me a gourdful of *guaro* and nudged me, pointing at the women. But having spluttered over the drink, which burned my throat amazingly, a great shyness held me. I could not face the women. Some there were—many, even—who, having heard of the many colones in my pocket, smiled and turned their eyes invitingly. But none there could draw me from my shyness. Then I saw *her*—Yrena.

Daughter of old Simon, our foreman, was she; lacking one month of seventeen years and marvelously fair. But you have seen her, señor; you know her slim, quick beauty of figure; the loveliness of her face. But you cannot understand how she seemed to me that night, as her soft, dark eyes rested curiously upon me. For she was truly the first woman I had ever seen; others had been mere shapes to me, glimpsed dimly in passing. Without knowing what I did I set down the *guaro* gourd and moved—and stood beside her.

For a moment she looked into my face, then her eyes covered me from shoulders to bare feet and came back to my face again. There was a little fear of me that showed in her gaze, but interest, also. Under my half-closed eyes she flushed hotly, then smiled.

"You are 'He-Who-Handles-Serpents'!" she said, and with the speech she shivered.

Sometimes, señor, words come to me in such arrangement as to make them seem strange; as to make me doubt, almost, that I have marshaled them so. My father had that way. Now, staring always into her eyes, it was so.

"I am the bondservant of Beauty," I told her; and she clapped her little hands and laughed delightedly.

Then sight of the others loosened my slow tongue.

"Will you dance with me?" I asked her, and she nodded.

We danced much that night. There was a thrill like to nothing I had ever dreamed of, in feeling beside me that lithe, vibrant body, that moved with mine, like a very part of me, yet which was a creature separate, strange. I know what I mean, but perhaps my telling is clumsy, as if with pointed stick upon the dust I scratched a shapeless figure and said that it was the jaguar, which I could see as plainly as if he stood and breathed before me.

Old Anna, she who owned the hut, selling *guaro* and food; bright trinkets for the women's hair and necks and ears; she found in me her best customer. For whatever I saw that it seemed Yrena might fancy—necklaces, earrings, finger-rings, pins with stones of many brilliant colors; a red mantilla and a purple one—I bought. My thick roll of colon-bills I threw each time upon the bar before old Anna, letting her take whatever she chose to call her price. Ha! Few loggers had ever bought so much; none, I think, without haggling! Old Anna grinned with toothless gums whenever I glanced her way. Yrena smiled at me. . . .

There were men who would have stepped between me and the girl. Many of the loggers had eyes to see that to all the women there—or elsewhere—Simon's slim daughter was as a graceful doe in the jungle-flowers, against a foundered cow in a corral. One man, particularly, watched us always as we danced. He leaned upon the bar, seeming a live thing only in hand and eye. The hand moved to take up his gourd of *guaro* and carry it to his lips; set it down again. The eyes——

Gato is no townsman! The jungle is his town, señor. But when one has learned to listen to the wild beasts' cry; can say what each means when he raises his voice; when he has watched the animals about their business; can tell by their faces what next they mean to do; I say that to the man who does these things, reading the eyes and faces of men is no hard matter. So in this tall logger's eyes—he was named Rafael Mora—I read a hunger and an anger. Like a jaguar's in mating-time they were; hungry, but not for eating; angry, with himself and with the one who came between him and the luring her-thing he desired. It was not all—I thought—a desire for Yrena's prettiness. It was a yearning to hold her always, but her—her Inwardness; her spirit; her heart. No less this—more, it may be—than the slim roundness of her flesh.

After that night, whenever the cutters came down to drink and dance, they found Gato beside them. Maybe a little before them. But yes! Always Yrena danced with me more than with any other, although she danced with Rafael Mora sometimes. Whenever I danced with her, or sat in a dusky corner close beside her, Rafael drank the *guaro* and watched with those steady flaming eyes. There was uneasiness in old Simon's face always, as he looked from Rafael to me.

In the cuttings, men laughed at me for a jungle creature, as they had done before, for all that I drank and danced nowadays even as they did. Now, queerly, none of them could rouse my anger with the silly things they said. None, I mean, except Rafael. His words, though silly as the others', had a strange power to wake in me a sort of hotness of mind. Of all the cutters, none could compare with Rafael and me. He could lift or roll the log that otherwise four men were sent to handle. So could I. He was very tall for a Costaricense—who are mostly short and wide of shoulder. So was I. My mother was like the Mayans, thick of body and not long; but my father was six feet tall without shoes and his height he gave to me.

"Ha! Jungle rat!" Rafael would laugh, as we worked at the cutting and the ox-teams waited to haul the logs down to the stream. "Have you seen the toboba who calls herself your sister?" Or:

"Yesterday came into camp a fat javali—a wild pig—saying that he looked for his cousin, Gato. Saw you him?"

Silly things, of course, but very near to anger could Rafael bring me. On the third time of my going to Puntarenas with the loggers, we found that old Anna, taking many colones from our pockets and desiring to take yet more, had made her house much larger. The new floor was of earth, but hard-packed and long, giving us much room for the dancing. Every one was gay that night; the men drank and danced and laughed and made much rough love to the girls.

YRENA I danced with before any other could reach her. Rafael, close behind, snarled "Jungle rat!" in my ear, then turned back to the bar. He stood there, his dark face darker with his anger. He drank and watched us, turning his head a little when other dancers came between so that never were we free from his flaming stare. More than he had ever drunk did he drink that night; angrier than he had ever been was he after a time. But Yrena and I forgot him; we went to a bench in a corner and there boldness came to me.

Without caring for anything, except to do that which I desired to do, for the first time I took her slender hand—ashine with the many bright rings I had bought her. I held it tight until her eyes, hidden from me by the sag of the soft, curling lashes, came shyly up to my eager face. Instantly she looked away, but in the time that I had seen, much had I seen. A little of fear—though less by far than she had always shown of me at first—and, I dared fancy, dawning of love for Gato Viejo.

Then around her slim waist I slipped my arm; with the feel of her so, a great swelling came into my chest, that seemed to strain it from waist to neck. She made as if to draw away but when I held her, she pulled against my arm no longer and smiled—oh, so shyly!—up at me. Why, do you blame me if there was nothing else on all this earth for me in that moment? Nothing except Yrena; the room vanished; the laughing dancers; no sound came to me of their voices or padding feet. Then one sound, not loud, pierced to my brain; made me whirl. It was such a snarl as any wildcat might loose when in deadly rage.

RAFAEL stood behind me. He swayed a little on his bare feet—but not, I think, from the *guaro*. His great hand was hooked like an animal's claw just over the hilt of his machete; I thought for an instant that he must whip out the long blade.

"Thou thieving jungle cat!" he said with a terrible softness. His eyes flamed down at me; the hooked fingers curled and uncurled. Then, most suddenly, his hand fell away from the broad belt of many buckles. He threw back his head and laughed; so loud, so strange, was the sound that all the room fell quiet. Men and women turned to stare.

"Why!" roared Rafael, then laughed and laughed and laughed, though never were his eyes other than as blazing coals. "Why, this tame little jungle cat, who styles himself so fiercely; he thinks that he is like to others—men! See him, all of you! Like the monkeys in the tree-tops, he watches men at their affairs; he says: 'Now, *I* will be a man! See me act as men do!' "

It was really funny, the way he made his voice shrill and little like the monkey's chirping talk. Without thinking, I laughed with the others. Then I chanced to see Yrena's face and she stared with a great scorn—of me. As she looked up at Rafael, into her eyes came a light as of admiration born against her will.

So Rafael mocked me loudly, while the other cutters and their women laughed and laughed and Yrena looked from me to Rafael, as I have said.

"Who named him 'Wildcat'? Who was that one, of mind that knew funniness so well that for a huge jest he called this 'Wildcat'? *Por Dios!*" bellowed Rafael. "I could love that one! I, also, see quickly the jest!"

Señor! For all that Yrena stared at me so scornfully, what Rafael said was exactly as the chatter of a monkey would have been, heard from a distance as I followed a jungle trail. Still my arm was about Yrena. I glanced down the room at the cutters and their women; on their faces was the expression of listening; of waiting. It came to me to wonder what it was that they awaited. Then sharply a hand struck mine from the other side of Yrena; my arm was pushed down. I whirled, but—it was *Yrena* who had moved!

Something stirred within me then. Rafael's handsome, sneering face; his words, which until then had but amused; the grins of the cutters and the women; all these had suddenly the power to light a blaze within my breast. A machete dangled at my belt, as well as at Rafael's, but there came to me no impulse to snatch it out. But with a single movement I stood; faced Rafael. From all those who watched came at the same instant a gasp of quick-drawn breath. Rafael smiled, only his lips moving. His eyes still held fierce hate; his hand hovered at machete-hilt.

But I had no thought to hack at him with my sharp blade. I only stood. After a moment so, some one down the room laughed. Then all laughed together, with a mocking sound.

"What old woman desires a tame cat for her hut?" some one shouted. "A tame cat! A cat that dares not scratch!" others called as loudly.

Without heeding them, past Rafael I stepped and he whirled, with hand still ready, to watch me with those hot eyes. To the door I went, while the cutters and their women—and Yrena, which was worst—laughed and laughed and laughed. Again they shouted that a very tame cat was Gato; the tiniest of gatillos—a baby of the cats. Then I turned in the doorway.

"When I come back," said I in the sudden quietness—and it was as if some one put into my mouth the words—"I will stand here as I stand now, but you—all of you—will not stand as you stand now."

Oh, then it was that they laughed and shouted! Rafael came forward two great paces. Something flashed before him like a mirror in a sunbeam. His hand had moved to his belt so swiftly that none might watch it. Straight toward me gleamed in a bright line the long machete. Above my head, upon the door-frame, it struck, dropping at my feet. I left it there and stepped outside into the black night.

Something told me what I must do. It did not seem that I thought at all. I stood and sniffed; then moved forward a little way to sniff again. I knew what I sought. Forward, then to the right; in a moment I was turning back to the door. Still they laughed and shouted silliness about the tame cat that squalled so loudly. Then in the doorway with the black night against his back stood Gato Viejo, with hands held high above his head.

Señor! The stone figures which you have found in ancient places of the Predecessors could have been no stiller than these, so noisy but an instant before! So I held them stiff, breathless, while from face to face I turned my eyes. Then one step forward I took, lowering my hands until they were at my waist, but thrust out toward the cutters and their women. The tobobas in my hands writhed their slim bodies—as these from my pockets do now. From side to side moved the flat heads in wicked rhythm. They, too, seemed to stare at the people.

Señor! Not enough doors and windows had old Anna made in her new house! Each man and woman needed one and at the same moment. Those who did not find an opening strove to make one. Screams and shrieks! Fighting with teeth and finger-nails and fists; men striking women and being struck in return! Mad struggling toward each narrow opening like wild cattle fear-smitten at the gate of a corral! Then they were outside. Old Anna—when she came back—would find that she must have doors and windows remade.

Even when outside the people made no halt; the pounding of their feet, their yells, went farther and farther away. Inside there stood only Gato, a writhing toboba in each hand; Yrena, who shrank away against the wall; old Simon, her father, whose machete whirled steadily to make a barrier before him—and Rafael Mora.

Rafael had moved swiftly until he stood between Yrena and me. His face was no darker than a ripened lemon, but if fear lurked in his eyes, his mouth was wide and tight. With folded arms—I stood upon his machete—he watched me.

Toward Rafael I went, while Simon flashed his blade and cudgeled his memory for the names of saints not often troubled by him; while Yrena crouched moveless against the wall, her eyes widened with horror. Rafael watched me steadily as I neared him; the tobobas began slowly to gather their muscles for the spring. Why, señor! It was foolish for any man to face me then—unless he held a gun that could not miss! I had but to jerk my hands upward; open them. The tobobas, flung against Rafael, could not be warded off before their fangs were fleshed.

"TAME cat am I, Rafael, my good friend?" I laughed. "Why, I ask you! What need for Gato Viejo to use his teeth or claws, when he commands teeth like these?"

Within a half-foot of his face the tobobas struck—right! left!—like darts of dusky shadow. Angrily they hissed for that I made them strike short. Señor! That brave idiot, frightened as all men are frightened of The Snake, he moved not one inch! But through the yellowed skin of his forehead burst twinkling drops as if squeezed out. Yet his eyes remained on mine.

"Jungle cat!" he spat contemptuously. "Jungle cat! Men fight with their hands!"

Perhaps that saved him from the tobobas; perhaps if he had only stood I would have flung my friends into his face. Perhaps. For I was filled with a hot lust to see him dead before me. He had jerked Yrena from my arms, no less than if he had used his big hands for the task. But now—I could not. At Yrena I looked sidewise; still she crouched with horror-darkened eyes and mouth sagging; her face whiter than her undyed cotton dress. To me came knowledge that was like a knife in my heart: It was no more the serpents in my hands that made her so than it was—Gato Viejo.

Swiftly I stooped; upon the earthen floor at my feet the tobobas coiled; inch by inch and loop by loop; with a dry rustling as scales rubbed scales. Even those others could smell the angry reptiles; to me the odor of a thousand could have been no more strong. At these two—Simon was still pattering up and down his list of holy names—who meant all in my life, I stared. Yrena, I saw, thought that the snakes would now go forward and kill Rafael. Rafael, it may be, thought the same, although— Well, brave men are not always wise; do not always read aright the intent of other brave men. It may be that he thought likewise, but—perhaps he knew.

Ask me nothing of what I said, or thought, or did. It is enough that again the serpents moved; out of the coils they came, heads low, bodies lengthening. But they turned, señor; went toward the door through which I had brought them. Outside they slid; were gone.

"NOW, Rafael," I said slowly, "Gato will show that he can use his own teeth and claws, even though he may command such as—those."

With that I drew my machete, but only to throw it well behind me. One wrist of Rafael—the left—I caught with my left hand. *Por Dios!* A tall, strong man, Rafael! The thick neck of him shortened, thickened, as his muscles tightened. From being lemon-colored his skin was now deep red; his eyes smoldered; his heavy shoulders seemed to swell. A tall, strong man! But what of Gato? For all Rafael struggled to free that wrist I think that my gripping hand hardly quivered. Then, when he found himself helpless, over my left arm I shot my right hand, to grip his right wrist.

Señor, it was good to feel that great body of his stiff as any log; good to know that Rafael knew himself to be no longer the strongest man in all the logging-camps. That was good, but best of all was it to turn my head a little and meet Yrena's eyes; to see that the horror of the serpents—of *me*—was changed now to admiration. Why, had Rafael commanded the strength of twenty men, under the joy of that sight, somehow Gato Viejo would have done the thing that he did.

We stood, I with arms crossed, holding him moveless. Slowly, so that he might know that by greater strength, not a trick, he was mastered, I pushed my right arm upward, my left downward, until he was held with one arm above his head and the other at his side. Still I pushed, until his big body was twisted sidewise; until he gasped for breath, head downward. Then I let him go; seized him as he struck the floor and picked him up again. As one would throw a heavy stick, so I flung him from me. He struck the wall and lay senseless, bleeding at nose and mouth.

Yrena smiled up at me when I stood before her; if there was a little fear in her eyes, it was the kind of fear that a woman should have of her man, because of his greater strength, his fierceness of temper when enraged.

"I feared that you would kill him," she whispered, as I held her close against me. "I feared that you would kill him as—as—'He-Who-Handles-Serpents' kills. If he is dead now, what matter? It was as a *man* that the deed was done!"

"You love me?"

"I love you! I love your mighty strength; your gentleness with me. But—when I think of you with serpents in your hands"—she shivered—"that thought is terrible!"

It was perhaps two weeks later, when I had had time to think over Yrena's parting words, that I rode down to Puntarenas bearing a paper for my boss-señor to the captain of a ship. I rode upon a mule, not swiftly, for there was much moving in my head. Yrena truly loved me, but not as a woman loves a man even when she fears him a little. That fear would be of things in him which, if fearful, were still things of men. Yrena's fear of me was the fear one might feel of a being not quite of earth; the worst fear mankind may know.

The trail I followed upon my jogging mule passed the big hut of Simon, where he and his bedridden wife lived with her step-daughter, Yrena. The town was a mile beyond. I had thought that in passing I might see my love; I would not have loved, otherwise. But as I reached the clearing before the hut, I had not thought of being greeted by a loud scream, in which desperate fear and thankfulness blended.

"Gato! Gato!" called Yrena. "Come quickly! None but you may save her!"

Down from the mule I leaped; ran to where Yrena was in the hut door. She held a long stick and with this she pointed within. I looked and saw upon the end of the rough bed that held the old woman, her stepmother, a little toboba. In this region, señor, the snakes often crawl into the huts and must be driven out again.

"I dared not touch it, lest in striking, it should strike *her!*" gasped Yrena, pointing.

The old woman had drawn herself toward the other end of the bed, so far as her crippled body would let her move. Now, at each slightest move she made the snake—no more than two feet distant—reared its head, threatening to strike. It was in bad temper, for it had shed its old skin but a little time before and was hungry.

There is nothing more to say of this business, señor, except that as I stood watching steadily from the door, with Yrena, frightened but trustful, waiting with widened eyes, the toboba moved, slid down from the bed like a rope, dropped and crawled up to my feet. Yrena screamed and leaped away, so I——

The toboba uncoiled again and crossed the clearing to the jungle and still I stood moveless.

"You spoke to it!" cried Yrena suddenly.

I said nothing. What was there I could say? As well try to explain how I smell; how I hear. One can string words together, but when all the words man knows are out, there still remains the thing, which is not explained.

Half she looked as if she loved me more than anything on earth; half, though, as if in the dark night she had seen the fearful spirits of the dead. That hurt, senor! I am different; that I know well. But love her—ah! there is nothing strange about my love. It is as a man, with all the blood of me afire, that I love Yrena.

Three months and more ago, this was. That day, before I went on to deliver the paper I carried, Yrena told me that when we finished work at the cutting, our marriage would be. This she said to me with that manner of which I have told you, half loving, half fearful. I kissed her and the fear left her eyes—or almost all of it.

Back I went to the cutting. My account with the paymaster grew, for no more would Yrena let me come down to dance and drink and buy her whatever old Anna would sell me. We had to think of a house; of—yes, she spoke of the children; in a low voice, but with a gladness.

This morning I came down from the cutting—came as far as the house of Simon. All work is done. The loggers now gather in the town to wait for night to bring the dancing. Rafael, who after my handling him came no more to our cutting, has been here for a week.

I have seen him; have seen Yrena also. It was this way: I came swiftly along the trail—not the wide trail that leads past the front of Simon's house, but a little bridlepath that is shorter and ends at the rear of the hut. I was still some distance from the clearing when I heard voices, low voices, using the tone that means earnest words.

Since one was Rafael's voice, I came forward softly and halted behind a bush from which I might see them, Yrena and Rafael, as she leaned against the hut wall and he stood eagerly before her, speaking with quick outflinging of his big hands.

"YOU will marry him?" Rafael was asking.

I saw Yrena's quiet face as she nodded. "I will marry him!" It was as if she took then a solemn vow, señor.

"But you love him not!" cried Rafael.

"I *do* love him. More than any man in the world I love him. There is no man like him; so is my love for him like none that I could feel for another—for you."

"I say you do not love him! What sort of love is it that is nine-tenths dread? I know your mind, Yrena! The love that I have is of that kind which makes me keen of eyes and mind; my eyes are seldom off your face; its every shadow of expression tells me what you think. I am no common thick-headed logger; I have a brain, me!"

"I do love him. If when he holds me in his arms the love must battle fear, still is it love. If I have the feeling, when his lips hold mine, that I am kissed by one who is not altogether of this earth, it makes no difference in my love."

"You cannot love him as you would love a man like other men!" cried Rafael. "Bethink you of his way of handling serpents—Ah, you shudder despite yourself! Remember that if you go to his house, you will live therein not only with him, but with that—that crawling family of which he is master. Upon the floor; in your very bed; anywhere you may find one of his cold, slimy fellows. Think of that, Yrena!"

"I have thought!" Her voice was steady,

but I knew that only her will held down betrayal of that horror which more than once I had seen in her eyes.

"Yrena! Yrena! Come to me! Come with me! In my arms you will find no toboba for a rival. I am no snake-master! This man, I tell you, is not as other men. What he is I know not, except that for all his man's body he is either more or less than human. Come with me; let me stand between you and him. If you fear to do that, then will we go far away, so far that he can never find us. You know I have loved you always; long before this half-man came from his serpents' nest in the jungle, I loved you. He has charmed you away from me; you loved me once."

"I thought that I did. But when he came I knew better. Go, Rafael! He comes to-day and he must not find you here. I will marry him and a good wife will I be to him. Did I break my promise and marry you; trust you to protect me; fly with you as you ask; that would gain you nothing, nor me. I have looked into his eyes; when I meet their strangeness, it may be that I am charmed, as a bird is fascinated by a snake's gaze.

"I know that we could never go far enough to escape him; if we stayed or if we went, he would not a second time send away his tobobas, leaving you alive. If he were dead; if I had never seen him; why, then I might listen to you. But I cannot say to you that I want him dead; that I am sorry I have known him. For love him—no matter with what that love is mixed—I do. Go, Rafael!"

He was a little way ahead of me, only, señor, as he went sullenly toward the town. For I could not face her then. So I slipped into the jungle and around the clearing, coming into the wide trail nearer town. All morning I walked up and down; twice I saw Rafael and I knew, each time, that he was very, very near to whipping out his machete and trying with the steel what he had not accomplished with his hands. But I would give him no opportunity.

SEÑOR, now you know as much as I! For all her shrinkings from my strangeness, Yrena is mine! She will marry me. Now, I have told you the tale. You are paid. Let us speak of Peten; how best to get there and what we shall do.

Madre de Dios! Must I then make for you a picture to show clearly what I say? Ah, your pardon, my patron! My temper is short, to-day. I meant only that I desire greatly to go with you on your journeyings. To see the great jungles that cover the land where once my mother's people were mighty folk; to look upon the sacred places; even to travel past Lake Peten-Itza and penetrate, perhaps, the forbidden fastnesses of Icaíche, the dread retreat of those free Mayas who hold themselves aloof—Why, señor, what more could man ask?

Will I be willing to leave my wife upon the wedding day? Do you, then, leave within the week? On Thursday, my patron? Why, then, on Thursday will Gato be ready!

Señor, you speak an untruth! However unwittingly, it is still a false saying. I told you in the beginning that of all the women on earth, Gato holds in his heart the image of only one. From now until death; past death, if our belief in a future life be well founded; until he cannot love longer; so long will Gato love Yrena.

Again you speak falsely! However it may seem, my request of you does not "oddly betoken love." It is greatest proof that I can give; an ordeal that demands of me the exercise of all my will-power. So easy would it be to yield to my desires; so pleasant! Now, Name of a Name! Can I make my meaning plainer?

Were there, then, no Gato, Yrena would marry Rafael with gladness; find happiness in his arms. But Gato lives; a strange creature, not like others; half Yrena loves, half fears him. Knowing this, can Gato, then, ignore her shrinking and hold her, as my snakes would hold a tiny bird enthralled? Not so! To men—women; to the half-man, Gato— Why, señor, I think that you must see that for Gato is left only your service. Women—a woman—Yrena, my heart, my *heart!*—are not for him; never for him.

She will marry Rafael when I am gone and she is sure that never do I come back. She will think of me sometimes, but without much depth of thought, as women recall the ghosts of old loves. She will be happier with Rafael than ever I could have made her. And Gato——

Señor, I thank you! We shall see strange things, jungle-ranging in Peten!

A Novelette Complete in This Issue

Saved *by* Grace

Take from Us Those Dear Souls Who Observe Rules Literally and You Will Decrease Our Sources of Humor by 90 per Cent. "Buy Cheap; Sell at a Profit." This Is Usually a Sound Business Maxim, but——

By William Ashley Anderson

Author of "The Witch of Gondar" and "The Desert Decides"

Illustration by Joseph A. Maturo

THREE men stood in the early-morning light gazing across the interminable flood plain of the lower Peiho, watching for the first smudge of smoke that would indicate the position of Tientsin. One was the ship's officer, a short, red-faced, explosive Englishman who had sailed in Asiatic waters for twenty-five years. The second, who had been pumping him assiduously but with an air of authority with all sorts of questions pertaining to coastwise and inland shipping, was a heavily built American of middle age with alert penetrating hazel eyes and the bland countenance of a man of affairs. The third, who might have been taken at a glance for the American's young secretary, was in fact an independent traveler. He was the most callow young "griffin" who had ever leaned upon the railing of the *Sikiang*.

Tall, sandy-complexioned, restless, quick to laugh but earnest in his manner, the youthful Con Colfax gave a true impression of an impatient, candid, and good-natured spirit. He was no respecter of persons and had first made the skipper's acquaintance by requesting permission to ascend the ship's bridge while crossing the Taku bar in heavy weather. The Englishman's apoplectic speechlessness on that occasion had not prevented the boy from resuming the acquaintance on the following morning, since he had many questions to ask about the conservation of the Peiho whose slimy banks were so close to the cautiously creeping ship that the slowly revolving propeller blades sucked them dry and Colfax might have flung his new white sun helmet ashore. After a few sarcastic replies the skipper fled with a harried expression in his eyes.

Before he reached his bridge he ran into F. P. Calhoun, the American man of affairs, and since he found in him a congenial talker he paused at the railing to pass the time of day with him, and point out the approximate position of Tientsin. Here he was again overtaken by Colfax, but he ignored him and held his place, somewhat volubly pouring information into the willing ears of the somber Calhoun, who lost none of his unapproachable dignity though wrapped in an old bath-robe and standing badly in need of a shave.

Colfax drew near and listened impatiently for the first opening.

"Skipper," he asked earnestly, "is this creek a canal or a regular river?"

"I'm blasted if I know!" exploded the skipper. After a moment's effort to master himself, he added peevishly: "Look here, young fellow, can't you figure out things like that yourself, without asking silly questions?"

"But I never saw a canal!"

"Aside from that," insisted the skipper coaxingly, "don't you think it would be best to observe before asking?"

Colfax was hurt.

"I did," he protested. "It looks like a river; and it looks like a canal. How can I tell if I don't ask? Of course if you object—But they told me in Shanghai that no one would object, that every one out here likes to talk, that all you've got to do is ask a question and any one will tell you everything he knows——"

"How long have you been in the country?" demanded the skipper.

"Four days in Shanghai—just long enough to get some white clothes."

"Oh, that explains it! Some one was pulling your leg. Let me tell you this, young fellow: don't ask questions! Don't do it! If you start that sort of thing, the people out here are going to put you down for a silly ignoramus. Am I right, Mr. Calhoun?"

Mr. Calhoun looked distastefully at his young compatriot, and nodded.

"The men who succeed," he said sententiously, "are the men who do things—not those who wait to ask questions!"

"Well, how the dickens can you know what to do unless you ask?"

"Go ahead and do it anyway!" exclaimed the skipper with a burst of laughter, his affability having been instantly restored by the approving attitude of the man of affairs. "Do something! In this part of the world nobody cares how you do a thing so long as you get good results. When I first signed up out here the skipper traded besides running his ship; we had a motto: 'Anything goes on the China coast!' Right it was, too. And I'm beggared," he added vehemently, "if it isn't just as true to-day! Am I right, sir?"

"Eh—well," said the man of affairs, "results usually prove the means, if—eh—you see what I mean."

"Look here," said the skipper pointedly to Colfax. "You're joining some firm in Tientsin, aren't you?"

"The Universal Trading Company."

"Well, damn it all, you've got a cheek asking me questions! Why, you boys know more about China than the books do! The last trip up I had three of you on board; one had just come in from Tibet, down the Yangtse; another was going across the Gobi to Urga; and the third chap had a stiff neck from where he'd been shot by a bandit."

"I've only been in the country four days."

"Well, mark my words, in six months you'll know more about the place than I've learned in twenty-five years. That's the way your company does—throws in the young men—no ruddy mossbacks! They expect you to use your imagination and your blasted nerve. That's how they get results. You're supposed to barge in. If you mess it—bingo! Correct idea, too. Am I right, Mr. Calhoun?"

"A MAN will get nowhere," said Mr. Calhoun coldly, "unless he has initiative. Business is just common sense. Buy cheap; sell at a profit. New organizations always invent new methods; but they all aim at the same result—profit."

At that moment the skipper pointed out Tientsin on the western horizon—a shadow in the uneven mists that still floated over the brown and green plain, slowly turning to a drab color under the melting sun. The masts of ships leaning against the bund were faintly smudged against a slate-blue sky. The outlines of spires and buildings could be dimly discerned. But the whole thing at that distance looked like a tangle of underbrush toward which the *Sikiang* meandered.

At the first sight Colfax felt the blood begin to throb in his throat with the same inexplicable emotion he had felt at the first appearance of a brown square-sailed junk wallowing far at sea in the long Pacific swell. This to him was the gate to China, the land to which he had come to make his fortune.

A moment later he had turned his back upon the scene—whose importance after all was principally in the imagination—and was walking along the deck, saying gaily:

"Well, well! I thought you were going to watch the sun come up like thunder!"

"I overslept," said Grace Calhoun with a nervous laugh. "Where's dad? Oh, I see. Let's go to the other side!"

Twenty minutes later, as F. P. Calhoun came out of the bathroom and stepped on deck for another view of the approaching city, he saw the plump lively figure of his only daughter bending over the railing, with young Colfax's figure in a similar attitude beside her, both heads turned sideways, faces wreathed in smiles and sparkling with laughter, asking questions in low voices—utterly oblivious of the great city that was sweeping up to them. They were perfectly content in each other's company. But Mr. Calhoun was not content. He swore under his breath; and as he turned back to his cabin, he was muttering with irritation:

"I can't understand it! The first one she's shown any interest in—a babbling young ignoramus!"

When the *Sikiang* was finally warped into place alongside the bund, Grace Calhoun and Colfax were still talking earnestly together; but as the gangway was run out, and the passengers gathered at the shore railing, they drifted around to the empty starboard promenade. They knew that the time had come to separate; and suddenly words failed them. All at once Colfax placed his hand uncertainly upon hers. With an involuntary exclamation she turned her palm upward and squeezed his hand spasmodically. The next instant she was crushed against his tunic, and her full red lips were pressed by the first man's kiss they had ever known.

Startled, the two drew apart, looking at each other in a sort of frightened amazement, breathless, slightly delirious. Then they swayed, seeing each other in a golden mist, light-headed, tingling from head to foot, dazed and burning with the emotion that had swept them off their feet and flung them entranced into each other's arms.

"I—I can't understand it," stammered Grace, struggling for breath. "Oh, Con, I—I love you!"

"Oh, Grace!" said Colfax drunkenly.

Once more they were drawn tight into each other's arms in the feverish, desperate embrace of impulsive and irresponsible youth—oblivious to the rattle and clang of coolies' trucks, the rasping roar of winches or near-by coasters, oblivious to the curses, grunts, shuffling, the nasal singsong chants, the pounding feet on up-stream junks, the clogging dust and grimy heat, oblivious to all the world and its worries, submerged in the knowledge that they loved and were loved. It was first love—on three days' acquaintance—and, for the moment nothing else mattered.

A native steward, rattling a deck-chair, brought them back to China. The power of their emotion experienced an equally powerful reaction.

"Why can't we go on together to Peking?" moaned Grace, stricken at the thought of parting.

"I'd have to give up my job," groaned Colfax.

"Oh, give it up, and come with us!"

"How can I? I've got to make a living for—for us!"

Grace caught him by the arm, her face radiant again.

"Oh, never mind that," she said; "daddy will pay for everything!"

AT THAT moment daddy again came around the corner of the deck, and beheld them in this confidential attitude; and his expression changed in a fashion that somewhat alarmed the none too easily abashed Colfax. A flash of prescience warned the young man of the danger of discussing the proposition at that time.

"We—we were just saying good-by," he said hurriedly.

Mr. Calhoun took in, in one comprehensive glance, the radiant expression and the warm coloring of his vivacious daughter; the fascinating disorder of her hair; and the somewhat wild glint in her eye.

"Humph!" said he.

"But you must see us at the hotel," protested Grace.

"We're taking the train immediately for Peking," said her father with determination.

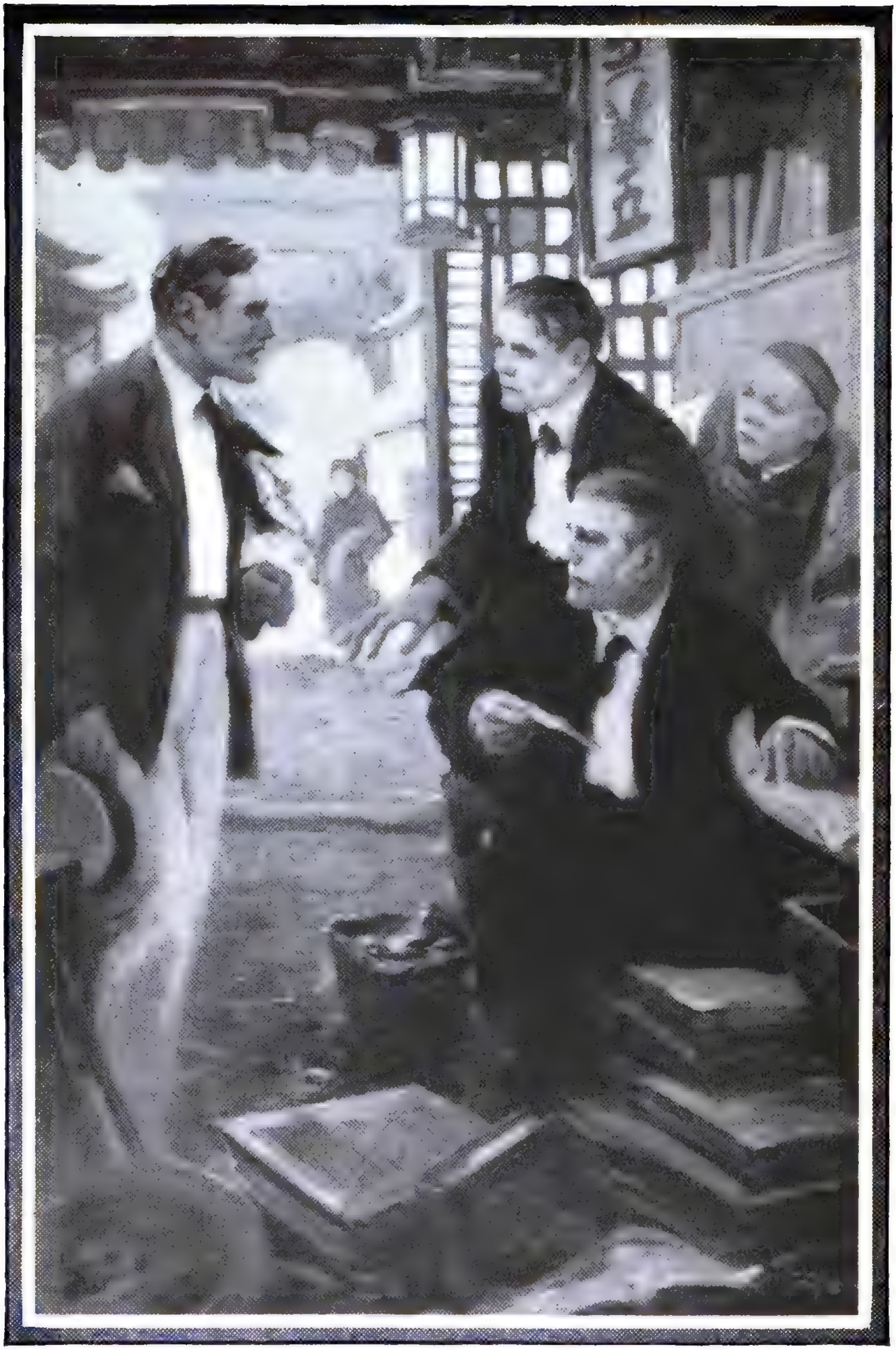
"Well, *can't* you come with us?" insisted the girl.

"No—no!" exclaimed Colfax in a panic, as he caught the expression in her father's eye. "I—I'll write you. They're expecting me here—and some one's probably on the boat looking for me now. I'm afraid I must say good-by now."

"I'm afraid you must," said the father.

"You will *not*," said the daughter. "I'll expect to see you at the train." She looked at him with sudden shyness; and without offering him her hand again, she smiled enigmatically, and turned away with her father, leaving him staring after her, miserable, half stupefied, not knowing what to do next.

At last he sighed lugubriously and walked forward to the smoking-room, where a shock



"But your deposits—why can't you show me the total? You know it, don't you?" Colfax exploded. "Oh, the devil! Yes, it shows a shortage of six thousand dollars!"

of a different kind was awaiting him, in the form of Sanford, the local manager of the Universal Trading Company.

SANFORD was a tall, dark, hot-headed man, with sharp perceptions, quick to reach decisions, and quick to act.

"Well, then let's hop it!" he exclaimed impatiently a moment after Colfax had introduced himself. "We're wasting time. I've got to clear up a lot of rubbish, and get back to this boat to-morrow night."

"What for?" asked Colfax politely, at the same time motioning to the steward to take his luggage down the gangway. Sanford frowned angrily.

"I don't know," he said. "I can't figure it out. Maybe they're firing me. I got a telegram yesterday, telling me to take the *Sikiang* to Shanghai without fail. Some impulsive fool probably got things mixed up; but I've got to go just the same. That's why we've got to rush."

"Well," said Colfax a minute later, as he climbed awkwardly into a rickshaw, leaving his bags to the disposal of Sanford's boy, "I'm sorry you took the trouble to come down to the boat for me. Couldn't you have sent some one else?"

"No. Every European in the district is out in the country."

"Who's going to take charge when you leave?"

"You."

"What!" yelled Colfax. "No! No! Oh, no! Why, I don't know a thing—not a single thing about the business yet. Why—why—oh, no! It's impossible!"

"For heaven's sake," cried Sanford as they swung at a gallop into Victoria Road, the main thoroughfare of the foreign concessions, "don't argue! I've got enough trouble on my hands! I'll write out complete instructions for you; then all you'll have to do is mind your own business until some one comes to relieve you. That will be in about five or six days, when Macon will reach here from Hankow."

"But——"

"Listen! Don't *talk* so much! Take hold of the situation and do the best you can. The devil! It's a wonderful opportunity! Go ahead and develop your own ideas, and see what you can make of it!"

Instead of developing new ideas, Colfax's mind was blackguarded into a sort of coma. Slumping back in his seat, he was whirled along the road that forms the backbone of the foreign city, hardly aware of the many fine shops, the splendid buildings, the clubs, and the picturesque crowds that make this one of the most important streets in North China. With his topi pulled low over his eyes to shut off some of the hot glare of sunlight reflected from the buildings and the pavement, he kept his eyes fixed in a frown on the bare sweating back of the rickshaw coolie, bounding in front of him, until they drew up with a jerk at the steps of the International Hotel, and he was flung by the momentum almost into the arms of the grinning coolie.

Sanford could not wait; but promising to see him again the following day, he turned about and sped away again, leaving the sandy-headed newcomer to make himself comfortable in his room, every little while pausing aghast to consider the possibilities of his situation.

At eleven o'clock he came back to life with a leap, remembering in a flash that Grace Calhoun was expecting him at the train.

He arrived at the station just in time to see the train pulling out, swimming over the flat plain in undulating heat waves; and he had no way of telling whether or not she saw him frantically gesticulating in the center of a crowd of keenly interested blue-clad Chinese whose close attention shut him off completely from view.

That day was Saturday, and since the foreign firms completely suspended business over the week-end, the men making flying trips to the seaside where their families were staying through the hot weather, it was impossible for Sanford to introduce Colfax to any one who might assist him, or to give him any but the sketchiest outline of the way of carrying on business. He himself had only two days to clear up his own affairs, business and private, and to give the new arrival at least an inkling of how to carry on until the arrival of Macon from Hankow.

Final instructions were given him after Sanford was actually on board the *Sikiang*, waiting for the ship to pull away from the bund. They were in the smoking-room, Sanford writing feverishly and Colfax asking wild questions, when the first call was sounded for going ashore.

With a short nervous laugh Colfax shook hands uncertainly with the departing manager, and began to move with evident reluctance through the gloom toward the gangway.

"*Hai-yah!*" exclaimed Sanford, yawning and laughing with relief, now that his end of the difficulty had been disposed of. "Be good, now, young man! Don't start figuring that you're eight thousand miles from home, and no one cares what you do! I'm no prude myself; but just the same, if you want some well-seasoned advice, why, be good! The best thing you can do is to meet some nice people here, go around to the consulate and make yourself agreeable; or Macon will introduce you when he gets here. As to the office," he added briskly, "I think everything ought to be pretty clear now. The Chinese clerks and Wang-Li, who acts as a sort of comprador, will carry on the ordinary routine. You just sign the papers Wang-Li gives you—everything's written down here in this book—and sit tight until Macon arrives——"

"Yes, sir," said Colfax with feeling, "I'll sit tight!"

"Well, I don't mean you're to do nothing! On the China Coast you're always expected to take a sporting chance. But there won't be much to do for the next few days. Simply follow those notes I put down for you. They're perfectly clear, aren't they?"

"Why, yes!" said Colfax a bit dubiously, opening the notebook and examining the memoranda.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Sanford with liverish exasperation. "Don't be doubtful about it. Do you—or don't you?"

"Look here," said Colfax suddenly, his eyes beginning to smolder. "I didn't make this mess. They sent me up here to learn! I've only been in the blamed country for eight days—five on the boat. I'm willing to take a sporting chance, all right, if that's what's expected. I'll follow the notes exactly. But just suppose the new fellow doesn't show up? What?"

His question was emphasized by the sudden clanging of bells: The siren belched asthmatically; the yellow confusion of coolies on the dock eddied back toward the road; and the cocoa flood of the river caught the ship's head and swung it around.

"Follow the notes!" shouted Sanford desperately. "The Chinese office force will take care of details. Don't take wooden money! Don't give anything away! And for heaven's sake don't make an ass of yourself! Here—quick! You'll have to jump! Jump!"

He plucked the notebook from Colfax's hands; remembered in time; thrust it back; seized the young man by the elbow; rushed him to the railing; and half pushed him overboard.

COLFAX made a frantic leap in the dark, and landed scratching and clawing at the stringpiece of the dock. Only an exceptionally strong and active man could have accomplished it. But he had saved himself at a sacrifice. The notebook flew from his hands; and a little wind-devil caught it and tossed it under the thrashing blades of the ship's propeller.

As Colfax picked himself up trembling, rubbing the gravel out of his palms, Sanford, whose figure was already shrouded in darkness, was shouting wildly:

"If those notes aren't clear——"

With a dazed but sullen expression on his face as he looked at the churning yellow froth where the notes had disappeared, Colfax muttered:

"Well, they're *not*—and that's all there is to it."

The fact that they were actually and definitely gone all at once lifted a load off Colfax's mind. As the vessel merged with the darkness down-stream, its presence indicated only by a few slowly moving lights, it occurred to him that the local affairs of the company would be in exactly the same condition if the manager had unexpectedly died. This somehow seemed to clarify the situation. It might be a good idea, he thought, still mechanically rubbing his numbed palms together and staring blankly after the vanishing ship, if he simply effaced himself for five or six days. It was an easy and simple solution!

His eyes lighted up. Pushing his topi to the back of his head—he had not yet learned to dispense with it after sunset—he thrust his hands in his pockets, and walked in the direction of Victoria Road, whistling shrilly.

It was a wonderful night, balmy and clear. The stars flickered in a velvet sky. From the river came the faint chant of coolies working on their junks. The air was drowsy with perfumes from the Victoria Gardens; sleepy birds stirred in the boughs of the trees along the road; and over all the broad-reaching city hung the enchanting canopy of mysterious romance.

Standing on the curb in the light of an arc lamp, he stared up and down the avenue at the blank faces of the closed European shops, at the few flickering lights on passing rickshaws, at the alternating light and shadow that cut the pavement in segments. It seemed silent, deserted, and lonely. It was only ten o'clock; he was alone, and it mattered to no one whether he returned to his hotel or not. In his pocket was a roll of bills; behind the soft curtain of shadows that hung before him was one of the greatest cities of China, warm and murmurous under the stars; and as he stood there, young, strong, and impatient, thrilling with energy and a vague tantalizing longing to share in the romantic adventure that seemed to palpitate in the balmy night just beyond his reach, he shuffled his feet nervously, turning his head this way and that, with friendly curious eyes.

He could see nothing but the stars above and the shadows that pressed him in, except for the vague outlines of an occasional rickshaw that swept out of the shadows with a sound like the rush of wings overhead and plunged into the darkness again. But though he could not see the occupants of these skimming vehicles, he was plainly visible to them. His slim pliant figure, swaying in the soft light, and his friendly face and well-balanced head attracted many eyes that glanced at him with varying expressions.

All at once one of these rickshaws, drawn silently by a powerful coolie in livery, swinging along with easy effortless strides, flashed into the light, almost grazing the curb at Colfax's feet.

Colfax was suddenly aware of a pair of velvet brown eyes, a delicate white face touched with color, and a mass of auburn hair. The friendly light turned the faint lines of dissipation about the eyes into soft intriguing shadows. The lines about the scarlet lips melted suddenly into a flashing smile—and the beautiful, beguiling, tantalizing face vanished in the dark, leaving only a faint perfume in the still air to prove that it had been there at all—that, and the clearly whispered words, "Hello, stranger!"

Colfax started violently.

"Hello!" he blurted, knocking off his topi as he reached to lift it. Then, struck by a mortifying doubt, he twisted his head around; but there was no one behind him. He shot a glance at the windows above; they were blank. He looked again after the rickshaw, his eyebrows raised, his lips slightly parted, his body rocking slightly on his toes, as though at the slightest hint from that vanished vision he would set out in pursuit. This, he felt with pounding heart, was romance!

Suddenly the rickshaw slid into another circle of light, slowed up, stopped. Colfax was tense with uncertainty, until the girl deliberately turned and waved to him. Stooping, he picked up his topi and ran toward her; but as he entered the shadow a second rickshaw passed hers, and the somewhat maudlin voice of a man called out:

"Cheerio, Goldie!"

"Shut up, you fool!" said the girl in a fierce whisper.

But Colfax understood. He brought himself to a halt, and drifted deeper into the shadows, the blood mounting to his head, until he reached the corner, and a rickshaw coolie plucked him by the sleeve and guided him into his machine. Five minutes later he was in his room at the hotel, looking out across a bend in the river where he could hear the heavy freight junks floundering by, and catch glimpses of the medley of ceaseless traffic crossing the International Bridge. His eye picked out the Northern Star, and his confused thoughts returned tumultuously to Grace Calhoun in Peking; and a wave of loneliness swept over him. After a moment another idea occurred to him; and he murmured to himself in a sort of amazement:

"Why, I'm—I'm actually *manager* of one of the largest import houses in North China! Why—of course, I can get married! If I can handle the job—if I can only get my hooks on to what it's all about—why, I'll show 'em! And Grace will marry me, too! I'll show 'em! If I make a mess of it—all right, then—bingo!"

With which happy and sustaining thought he tumbled into bed.

AT EIGHT o'clock the following morning Colfax found his way to the office of his company on Taku Road, which paralleled the handsomer Victoria Road, but led away into the purlieus of the Chinese city beyond; and found himself the first there, except for a fat, asthmatic, toad-like office boy, fifty years or more of age, who was busy in a remote corner of the building brewing a pot of tea in anticipation of the arrival of the clerks.

The building was an old rambling one-story cement structure with a dull tiled roof, set in a broad compound that was enclosed by high cement walls topped with broken glass. The compound also contained two great godowns where the imported stock was stored and raw materials for export were baled and packed. A fourth building contained the offices of the warehouseman, and the agent who handled the Universal Trading Company's goods up to the moment of delivery to the actual purchasers.

Colfax wandered about the compound, aimlessly watching the coolies at work in the godowns, and trying to form an intelligent impression of the significance of their activities; but, without a knowledge of the theory on which the business was based, it was all meaningless to him.

HE FOUND the office dark, silent, and clammy.

A handful of mail lay neatly on his desk; the black hermetically sealed safe, containing the code-books, bank-books, check-books, exchange tables, and other essential documents, squatted defiantly in one corner; and littered about the room were various samples of the goods he was expected to sell—but of which he knew absolutely nothing.

There were bottles of wine tonics, pieces of scented soap, tins of condensed milk, bolts of white sheeting, bundles of candles, and a number of other articles that had never heretofore meant anything in Colfax's life; and even now were as far removed from his immediate comprehension as though they were behind the plate-glass window of a closed store. He saw them; he could examine them at uninterrupted leisure—but the examination would, in the end, lead to nothing.

Though he felt his blood boiling with suppressed energy, and his imagination was leaping about trying to find some means of applying it, he caught at air. He could do nothing. After a while the place got on his nerves; he wanted to burst open the walls and jump out into the sunlight. At least he wanted to feel about him the cheerful bustle of active business.

Forced, by his determination to make good, to sit at the desk fingering sheets of figures that were utterly meaningless to him, since they represented Chinese names and strange currency, and turning over stacks of samples of which he knew nothing, he did his best to recall some of the notes Sanford had written down—but beyond vague suggestions his mind had remained a blank. He thought of the possibility of intercepting Sanford, but the *Sikiang* had already crossed the Taku bar and was at sea. There was no possibility of relief until Macon put in an appearance from Hankow.

"Well, if I can't, I can't!" he concluded, standing up. "The best thing for me to do is bury myself."

Wang-Li entered the room silently. Colfax looked up sharply at the rotund smiling figure, bowing to him and rubbing his hands together. The fresh light blue coat, the shaved forehead, the dimpling cheeks with a faint suggestion of color under the sallow skin, and the alert brown eyes, instantly reassured him.

He remembered that Sanford had said all routine business could be handled by the Chinese assistant. As soon as the introductions were over, therefore, and the two stood looking at each other dubiously, each waiting for the other to speak, Colfax blurted:

"Oh, Wang-Li, Mr. Sanford told me you could carry on the regular business routine without bothering me about details. Is that right?"

"Quite right, Mr. Colfax."

"Well, to tell the truth, my job is just to fill in until Mr. Macon comes from Hankow. You go on with your usual work," he added with sudden inspiration, "and I'll sign whatever you bring me!" He had no sooner said this than it struck him as a rather loose and dangerous offer; so he immediately swung to the other extreme of caution, adding: "But I don't want to see anything, except what's absolutely necessary! Understand?"

"I understand. Do you want to see the merchants yourself; or do you want me to attend to them?"

"Well, is it *necessary* for me to see them?"

"No-o," said Wang-Li reflectively. "I

can take their orders, and pass them on to you for your approval."

"Good! Where are the goods stored?"

"Just there," said the willing assistant, pointing through the window to one of the godowns.

"Good! What prices do we charge?"

Wang-Li looked surprised, then perplexed. After a moment's uncertainty, he said:

"Perhaps you can find Mr. Sanford's price list. He changed it each day. But it will show what prices will prevail. If you will name the prices for me I will get the orders." He leaned over and shuffled through the papers on the desk, extracting some sheets of paper. "Perhaps—ah, here you are, sir!"

Instantly the situation seemed to clear.

Colfax remembered the conversation on the *Sikiang*. Business was just common sense! Methods are of no importance, so long as you sell at a profit! Well, there were the goods within reach of his hand; there was a price list upon which to base the profits; and within call of his voice were customers—represented by Wang-Li—who were ready to buy! "If I can get a profit," he thought to himself, "by Jove I'll sell! That's common sense; and that's business!"

"Good!" he exclaimed. "All right, Wang-Li, we'll skin them alive! Leave those price lists here and I'll fix up a set for you after lunch. For the rest of the morning I don't want to be interrupted."

AS SOON as he was alone again he gained confidence. He felt convinced that Wang-Li had no suspicion of his rawness, and he began to believe that by working out each problem logically as it was presented he could keep from making any serious mistake, and yet manage to do business.

As a matter of fact the methods employed by the Universal Trading Company were of almost fool-proof simplicity; and had Colfax not lost the notes Sanford had given him, he might have been able to manage indefinitely.

All goods were consigned direct to the agent, the warehouseman, who stored them in his godown, taking care of all details connected with unloading, transferring, etc. A list of these goods as they arrived, or as they were shipped to the order of the Tientsin manager, was kept on file in the manager's office. The goods were then sold in bulk direct to the members of a guild of merchants, who paid cash on delivery for their purchases, in the following manner: An "order" was made out in triplicate and presented by the purchaser to the manager, who indorsed it; the purchaser's money was then sent to the bank (a fixed depository) with a copy of the indorsed "order" which was thereupon certified by the bank to show the deposit had actually been made. This "order" was then presented in turn to the agent, who actually delivered the goods at the godown to whoever presented the "order." The original of the "order" and the agent's copy, showing the bank's certification, were then sent to the head office at Shanghai, and the transaction was complete.

The advantage of the system was that the manager's duties were thereby limited to sales-managing. He had no books to keep; no financing to worry about; and no transportation problems to solve. He could concentrate on selling, advertising, and developing new business. There were, of course, many divergences from this basic system; but weeks might go by without any necessity of employing them; and Sanford was perfectly justified, therefore, in leaving the management temporarily to Colfax with the guidance of the notes.

Simple as the system was, however, it was a development of years of experience and expert judgment; and Colfax, a complete novice to business of any kind, could not be expected to solve it instinctively. Besides there were incidental problems that required more than ordinary common sense to arrive at a solution; and one of them lay on the desk before him.

Sanford's prices were made out in three parallel columns, giving the prices separately in American gold dollars, in Chinese silver dollars, and in Chinese taels. Each day's list showed slightly different figures, based upon—had Colfax only known it!—daily fluctuations in exchange as announced by the local banks.

Colfax refused to be beaten. To him the problem was now clear. Use common sense; sell at a profit; and you can't go wrong!

He compared the price lists under his hand, and finally struck a definite average. Raising the resulting prices a trifle to make certain of being on the safe side, he laid down a permanent basis on which to sell, in Chinese taels—since he knew that that coin was the official currency of the customs. What he did not know was that during the current year it had fluctuated in value between $1.01 and $1.48, Chinese; and that the Chinese dollar, in turn, had fluctuated in value between forty-five and fifty-five cents, American gold. This sort of problem was, of course, beyond him.

When he had completed his list, being alone in the room, he stuck his fingers to his nose at the safe, unbuttoned his jacket, tilted back in his chair with his heels on the desk, and lighting a cigarette smiled blandly at the ceiling.

In the afternoon, when Wang-Li came in again for the list, Colfax was whistling cheerily; at the same time, however, keeping a close eye on Wang-Li's expression as the experienced Chinese went over the list.

"Good," said Wang-Li.

"Good!" echoed Colfax loudly. "Now let's go to it!"

Wang-Li returned later with lists of sales, and three huge wads of bills. Colfax counted the bills with an air of sophistication, though his knees were feeling tired. He had set the prices down in taels, but the payment had been made in dollars! He would have asked for a complete explanation outright; but, remembering the skipper's warning not to make himself appear a silly ignoramus, he realized how easy it would be for Wang-Li to make huge secret profits if he knew how completely ignorant the American was.

"Eh, have you checked this carefully?" asked Colfax with an air of distraction.

"Oh, quite correct! Quite correct!"

COLFAX nodded; sighed gently; and, with a peculiar sickening thrill thrust over thirteen thousand dollars in his coat pockets.

Wang-Li said the merchants were waiting to take delivery of their goods; and laid the orders before Colfax for his signature. Colfax automatically signed them and handed them back. Wang-Li remained where he was.

"Well, what do you want now?" asked Colfax blankly.

"The money, sir."

"I don't get the idea."

"The idea, sir, is that we don't deliver until the money is in the bank."

It sounded to Colfax almost like a direct affront. He became confused and angry. His head was hot.

"Well, *I've* got the money, haven't I? That's just as good as being in the bank! There's my signature on the order! You can take the stuff out of the godown whenever you want it."

Wang-Li smiled uncertainly and slapped his hands together nervously to intimate he understood the joke.

"You must be pretty good friend of agent, Mr. Colfax! Never heretofore would he make such delivery."

"The agent! Oh! Ha!" Colfax swallowed with difficulty, and shuffled through the papers on his desk with an air of importance. He knew something was wrong, and he was wondering what chance he had of reclaiming the notes from the waters of the Peiho. Who the devil and what the devil was the agent? After a moment he gave it up. It was a fresh problem, requiring more than hasty thought. "I tell you what," he said, clearing his throat. "I'm going to make a change. The merchants will have to wait for their stuff until to-morrow. They can leave this money on deposit for delivery to-morrow—or they can have it back if they want."

Wang-Li made no comment, but drew a deep hissing breath with distress, and, raising his eyebrows, went out with the news. He returned a few minutes later to say the merchants had decided to leave the money.

"The exchange is too good!" said Wang-Li by way of explanation.

It didn't make much difference after all, Colfax assured himself, for the new manager was due to arrive any day, and he could turn the money over to him and make a joke of the experience. He could find out about the agent the next day; but in the meantime the bills in his pocket made him nervous. The drab-painted safe, with its secrets locked hermetically in its steel breast, seemed to be staring him out of countenance.

He didn't even know where to put his money.

He rang again for Wang-Li; but Wang-Li, acting on his own responsibility, had gone down to the Chinese city to investigate the condition of the hawker's trade. The few English-speaking clerks had departed; while the remainder, bowing and rubbing their hands, could give him no information.

He went around himself, therefore, to the Yokohama Specie Bank, and deposited the money in his own name. This, he felt, was a sagacious thing to do, since he had no power of attorney, and if he deposited it in the firm's name he might not be able to get it out as easily as he put it in.

"Do you want us to open a dollar account or a tael account?" asked the cashier obligingly.

"Why—eh—what's the difference? The money I have here is in dollars."

"Taels are more sensitive to the fluctuations of exchange," explained the cashier. "Dollars are less variable. Brokers usually have their accounts in taels."

"All right," said Colfax. "Make it taels."

With this bit of business off his mind he returned to the office once more and began systematically to sort the contents of the desk drawers. In the course of these operations he came across a slip of paper which had arrived in the week's mail, and whose significance he had not before understood. It was one of those forms which are never intended to be used except in great emergencies.

It was nothing less than a blank order from the head office in Shanghai, with a letter to the agent attached, giving the local manager (name blank!) full authority to withdraw the entire contents of the godown without delay, assuming complete responsibility for them. The political unrest throughout the country, and the threats which were being made against foreigners because of the great Multiple Power Loan they were proposing to make the reactionary group at Peking for which they contemplated taking over the nation's principal resources as collateral, were making foreign property unsafe. The Company's purpose, therefore, in providing this emergency authorization was to insure the removal of all goods at any time to a place of safety in case of danger from fire, looting, or a similar catastrophe. They could never have anticipated the use to which an inexperienced blunderer might put it!

Colfax did not care to know anything more about it than that he could get his hands on the goods and sell to the merchants without any outside interference. Accordingly he unhesitatingly typed in his name as acting local manager, and left it with a note for Wang-Li to present the following day.

Completely satisfied with himself and at peace with the world, he closed up the office and went around to the American consulate, where he made himself known. The Consul was a genial and big-hearted man, and after a cheerful and illuminating conversation, he insisted that Colfax should stay to tea.

He escorted him upstairs, accompanied by a handsome servant in the livery of the consulate, and ushered him into a magnificent drawing-room furnished with the opulence of the Orient, where his wife and a number of guests were chatting and laughing, and servants moved about carrying heavy silver tea-trays.

Colfax's restless personality, combined with an air of unsophistication, immediately won the attention and sympathy of the older ladies. His sandy complexion and twinkling alert eyes suggested a certain boyish mischievousness and suppressed fire, which, when his fresh complexion and strong slim figure were also taken into consideration, seemed to indicate a true American type. All instantly wanted to take charge of him, and mother him.

"NOW," said the Consul's wife, pouring her last cup of tea, and turning to confront him, "we must see that you are introduced to some nice young people."

At that moment Grace Calhoun appeared in the doorway of the upper veranda where several of the guests were laughing and playing with a shrieking cockatoo. Colfax, drawn involuntarily to his feet, choked over his dry sugar-biscuits until he cried, spilled tea on his white flannel trousers, tripped the house-boy, and very nearly upset the tray laden with heavy silver and delicate chinaware. He darted a wild glance at Grace, and placing his cup on the table, walked quickly across the room, reaching her side just as she turned her head to look into the room. Her eyes opened wide, and both hands flew to her bosom.

"Oh!" she gasped.

"Well!" said the Consul's wife. "That young man requires no introductions!"

"Where did you come from?" asked Colfax.

"You were not at the train! You forgot all about me!"

"I was! I didn't! Come outside; I want to talk to you. I've missed you terribly——"

"You never wrote me!"

"Oh, Grace, I've got the toughest job. I couldn't write. I couldn't even think. I don't know yet whether I'm standing on my head or my heels." He looked hastily around the well populated veranda. "Can't we sneak off somewhere?" he added in a hoarse whisper.

"No!"

"Where's your father?"

"He's in Peking."

She sat down on a rattan chair; and Colfax pulled a small stool forward and sat down opposite her.

"Well, then," he insisted, "why can't we? We'll get a couple of rickshaws and go for a ride. Oh, Lord, I'm glad to see you!"

"No," said Grace reluctantly. "You see, I'm a guest here while daddy's in Peking; and it would be too rude to go off now."

"You don't know how glad I am to see you! I'm just—just *suffocated* with work—all sorts of stock!—fancy price lists!—crazy exchange!"

"Please *don't* mention exchange to me!" exclaimed Grace.

"Why not?" said Colfax in astonishment.

"Well, father feeds it to me at all meals—and when he has no secretary around I have to write long reports full of the most appalling gibberish about collateral, refundings, and exchange—exchange—exchange!"

"I never thought you had anything to do with *that*," said Colfax feebly.

"What! Why, what did you suppose daddy's business was?"

"I don't know. I never thought of asking."

A glow came into Grace's countenance. Her eyes softened beautifully. It was as though a faint tautness of doubt and unease had suddenly dissolved in tenderness.

"Oh," she murmured softly, "you funny boy!" All at once her hand crept out and closed warmly over his. "You funny boy!" she whispered; and they looked at each other in silence, and forgot all about daddy and his business.

IN THE morning at about ten o'clock an irate apoplectic figure clutching a handful of papers burst into the office of the Universal Trading Company, where Colfax, tranquilly certain that he had reduced chaos to order, was reading through a sheaf of reports from the men in the field with a puzzled but intent air.

"My name's Owen," the newcomer announced fiercely, "and I've been acting as agent for your blasted firm here for the last four years. I never heard of such dashed impudence. My sacred aunt! Do you think I'm goin' to let you make a silly ass of me? What?"

Colfax, struck dumb, first felt his heart sicken; then his hair began to rise. But he could not speak!

"Any one'd think I'd been skrim-shanking about here like some opium-soaked babu! It's bad enough to spring a new manager on me, but why the blinkin' purgatory they couldn't at least have the decency——"

"Look here, you!" said Colfax thickly.

"Not too much of that 'Look here, you!'" spluttered the agent. "Your blankety-blank coolies are pulling out every bally box and bale from my godown."

"Well, haven't they got my authority?" Colfax shouted at last.

"They have! They can! They are! *Marskee!* I'm through!"

"You beat it!" Colfax choked.

"I beat what? I beat nothing! You put that in writing, and I'll damn well have you up for libel!"

Colfax, suffocated by his emotions, overcome by his helpless incoherence, face to face with the inexplicable, subsided in his chair.

"My accounts," said the agent viciously as he made his way to the door, "will be squared up to the end of the month. The sooner you clear your stuff out the better I'll like it. I've had enough of you and your silly authority——"

Colfax's last impression was of an ensanguined visage with tousled hair and blazing blue eyes passing rapidly across his window; indicating all too plainly a state of mind of frenzied indignation. The "new manager" sighed hopelessly. What had he done? Of one thing only was he certain; he would never under any circumstances ask advice of the agent!

Wang-Li came in, looking painfully incurious, rubbing his hands, sucking in his breath, and waiting for orders. Colfax told him faintly to carry on with the work.

Most of the day, therefore, was spent in transferring the contents of the godown to the office buildings, where every available foot of space in the offices, advertising rooms, corridors, and lofts, was soon occupied.

COLFAX'S uneasy suspicion that he had done something wrong continued to grow throughout the day.. He came to the conclusion, however, that since the fundamental principles on which he was working seemed logically correct, he could not be making any mistakes too serious for Macon to correct upon his arrival from Hankow.

The merchants were quick to take advantage of the flat prices set down by Colfax and materially increased their orders. In the rush of business, Colfax, carried away with elation and a sort of inflated confidence that was somewhat indicative of his character, ignored or treated with passing indifference the few disturbing impressions that sometimes came to him.

From half past seven in the cool of the morning until half-past five in the afternoon, with but a short intermission for tiffin, he was at his desk studying the old files, puzzling out strange reports, trying to translate into intelligible ideas the jumble of stock sheets, speaking to the merchants with whom he quickly got on friendly terms, personally checking the goods sold each day, and framing up a little record of his own so as to keep quite clear all the transactions in which he was involving himself. In this way he acquainted himself in a haphazard groping fashion with the details of the business.

Through his system of cramming he did in fact amass an astonishing amount of information as to the goods he had to sell, the market, and the conditions affecting trade.

Six working days passed. Nothing startling happened; but the receipts were piling up alarmingly, and the stock was rapidly dwindling away. As the days continued to slip by Colfax began to be filled with vaguely depressing doubts. What should he do when the stock was exhausted? What was he to do with the money at the bank?

Sanford had not yet arrived in Shanghai, his boat having been delayed at Tsingtau, and the head office was therefore not fully aware of the awkward situation in Tientsin; while Macon, who had been sent from Hankow to take over the Tientsin managership, had met with a delay along the railroad.

All Colfax's worries, however, vanished each evening when he left the office in three strides, dived into a waiting rickshaw, and whirled away to find Grace, taking up on the way the consideration of some new plan for permanently securing her for himself.

Socially, Tientsin was virtually dead, almost every lady in the place having gone to the sea at Peitaiho or Shanhaikwan to escape the heat and to manufacture petty scandals with which to feed the gossiping winter months; while husbands and unattached aspirants to feminine favor journeyed down by the mail train every week-end, and picked at the bits of entertainment left over for the holidays.

Mr. Calhoun was obliged constantly to pass back and forth between Peking and the shore where many of the diplomats had gone to seek refuge from the stove-like walled capital. Each time he had to pass through Tientsin. Grace, therefore, sometimes accompanying him in one direction, sometimes in the other, insisted on establishing her headquarters at the middle point, Tientsin; and so her father had consented to her accepting the hospitality of his friends at the consulate while he was absent. His only doubt had been raised by the proximity of Colfax, but since he saw no sign of the objectionable young man on the occasions of several hasty visits to his daughter, this anxiety was finally lulled into forgetfulness.

Nevertheless, Grace and Colfax were making much of the meager opportunities for entertainment the Concessions offered.

Colfax discovered a little confectionery shop on the Rue de France in the rear of which, behind a few sere palms, they ate a fair imitation of ice-cream and meringues with iced coffee, and argued happily with each other. Grace hit on the idea of early-morning drives before breakfast on the Race Course Road. On Sunday, the Consul and his wife made up a picnic with some tourists, and they all went down the river in sampans, Colfax's delight being tempered only by an extraordinary but profitless interest in the litter of refuse that had caught in projections along the shore. Not once, however, did they have an opportunity of seeing each other in strict privacy until one evening after Colfax had ventured with Grace on a hasty shopping visit into the fringes of the Chinese city.

They came back to the consulate after dark. Dismissing the rickshaws at the gate, they walked toward the house through the soft shadows of a night that was made for dreams. And there, behind the screen of a magnolia tree, again they kissed, forgetting every difficulty in the overwhelming conviction that their love transcended everything. Grace, with her arms around him and her lips close to his, said she would follow him anywhere; while he, feeling like a giant strengthened by her love, told her they could get married immediately.

He had a little money in the bank; and he felt sure that, on the strength of what he had accomplished during the last two weeks, the Company would soon definitely establish him as a manager.

"You clever boy!" cooed Grace, and then laughed tenderly. "But I don't care what you are. I'd marry you if you were an office boy! You must speak to daddy when he arrives from Peitaiho to-morrow night!"

Colfax felt as if some one had splashed ice-water on the back of his neck. He shivered. Then in a fervor of love he crushed her tight in his arms.

"All right," he said hoarsely. "What do I care? I've got a good job, and I can support you."

"Oh, Con!" said Grace, burying her head on his shoulder. "You're so *different* from all the others! I love you! I really do! I *love* you!"

"Oh!" said Colfax, holding her tight and looking up at the stars, utterly incapable of coherent expression.

THE next morning Colfax found upon his desk a telegram from Macon in simple English, stating that he would arrive in Tientsin on the following afternoon.

Colfax's spirits rocketed.

The responsibility had been getting a bit too heavy. Unanswerable mail and unintelligible reports had accumulated upon his desk, and many other incidents of trifling importance in themselves had kept recurring until they filled him with misgiving and increasing doubts. Not the least of these was how to get more stock when his present supply was exhausted.

It occurred to him that the first thing Macon would want would be a complete and comprehensive résumé of all he had done. Colfax's detailed record contained all the necessary information; but before going to work on this, he told Wang-Li to make no fresh sales until the arrival of the new manager, so that his report would show nothing but finished business.

Then he drew up an accurate list of all his sales, to show the balance of stock on hand, and the total value of the goods he had sold. Everything checked beautifully. His stock showed the right balance; and his collections had been deposited in a lump sum safely in bank.

He had actually collected more than $98,000, Chinese. This sum he had deposited as taels in the bank. The total of his selling prices in taels exactly equaled the amount of taels he had in bank. But all at once he felt an unpleasant riffle up his spine. He had dismissed all consideration of the maddening perplexities that surround all questions of exchange. Now it fell like a shadow over all other thoughts. Would the taels, when converted back into dollars to be handed to Macon, now total the sum he had collected—$98,000?

In a panic, he dashed off a chit to the bank asking the value of his taels when converted back into dollars. After twenty tense minutes the information was before him. The $98,000 had shrunk in round figures to $91,000!

Colfax seized his topi wildly and rushed around to the bank, demanding an explanation.

The Japanese cashier shrugged.

"Sir," he said indifferently, "surely it is obvious! The knowledge that the great Powers are about to float a huge loan has upset all exchange values. The value of the tael rises and falls more rapidly than the dollar. Every rumor upsets it. Three days ago, when it was said the American bankers were withdrawing, the value of the tael then went up. Had you withdrawn your money at that time you might have made a considerable sum! To-day it is down! Do you wish to close out the account?"

"No," said Colfax dazedly, turning toward the door. "No. I'll let it stand."

As he reached the open sunlight, he stood for a moment swaying dizzily, utterly oblivious of the rickshaw coolies who crowded about him clamoring for his trade. There was only one fact that seemed to blaze in his mind. He must report a shortage of more than six thousand dollars!

A hundred accusing thoughts flamed within him. Things he might have done now turned as evidence of guilt against him. He should have overcome his aversion of the agent, and conferred with him! He should have cabled the Company at Shanghai explaining his difficulties! He had made all deposits in his own name! There was no getting away from the fact, that, regardless of everything else, he had ostensibly gambled with the Company's money. And he had lost more than six thousand dollars!

The more he thought of it the more hopeless his situation seemed to be, because if he pleaded ignorance he sealed his fate, as an incompetent fool, and if he did not plead ignorance he seemed to stand convicted of crookedness.

It did not occur to him that, having made his deposits as taels, he could report his balance in taels. Only that which was obvious was clear to him! He had handed $98,000 in Chinese bank notes and silver over the counter of the bank; he could withdraw only $91,000 to hand to Macon!

He had made a mess of things, certainly.

All at once he recalled the skipper's words.

He turned his head this way and that, without seeing anything, and murmured:

"All right—bingo!"

After a moment he began to think of Grace. He began to walk rapidly, faster and faster, until passers-by turned and looked at him with puzzled expressions. He felt a nausea in his stomach that he could hardly control; his head buzzed; his knees felt weak.

He walked straight out on the Race Course Road into the open country until his feeling of depression and loneliness became unbearable, and then he turned back. Drawn by a lodestone he went to the hotel. It was then early tea time. He was half starved and famished.

The heat had made his complexion a mottled pink and white, streaked with perspiration. His collar strangled him. His topi, slipping down over his moist temples, rested on his ears. His dusty white suit clung to him clammily. He felt wilted, sticky, miserable.

Colfax had been forced by necessity to work beyond the usual hour for closing offices in Tientsin; so this was the first time he had approached the Astor House to find the veranda crowded with guests dressed in cool fresh linen and duck. The contrast emphasized his own dejected state, and as he approached the steps self-consciousness added to his misery. Only one thing remained to complete it; and it was there waiting for him!

AS HE looked right and left with glazing eyes, all at once he stumbled and came to an agitated halt. At the nearest table Grace Calhoun was chatting amiably with the agent. As a matter of fact, the agent was a good-looking and normally pleasant companion, socially in demand, and there was no reason in the world why she should not be having tea with him. But the expression on Colfax's face as he stared at them could not have shown more horror if her companion had been a savage Zulu.

The agent started with surprise, then burst out laughing.

Colfax was in no sense physically afraid of the agent, but he felt an exaggerated sense of guilt whenever he thought of him; and now, carried away by conflicting emotions, he shied off, taking a table by himself as though expecting a friend, and confusedly ordered a cool drink.

"Hello!" exclaimed the agent. "What's the matter with your countryman?"

Grace Calhoun turned her head sharply, and gave a suppressed exclamation at Colfax's wobegone appearance.

"Why," she said, "it's Con—Co—Mr. Colfax! I didn't know he was a friend of yours. Dad and I think such a lot of him——"

"No! Not really?"

"Dad thinks he's splendid!"

"Oh?"

Grace felt a blaze of unaccountable exasperation. Her mind was in confusion in an effort to find some sort of explanation that might satisfactorily account for Colfax's air of misery.

"Why do you always say 'Oh-h?'—just like that?" she demanded.

"What! Do I, really? Curious, I never noticed it!"

"Well, you do! And—and it's beastly! If you have something to say, for goodness' sake *say* it, don't try to sing it!"

The agent laughed dazedly.

"But—but you know you absolutely astonish me!"

"Do I?"

"You say your—your father thinks he's—he's splendid?"

"Why shouldn't he?"

Grace's jaw set firmly, and she looked at her companion with steady smoldering eyes. Being an Englishman, he was not particularly affected by that baleful glare, so he naïvely blundered on, looking innocently into his glass of lemon squash and stirring it interestedly with a swizzle-stick.

"Well, I don't," he said. "As a matter of fact, I haven't had much to do with him, because I washed my hands of his affairs the day after he arrived. Candidly, I think he's either a fool or a knave. Business, of course—nothing personal. I've just had a cable from their head office saying their new manager is due in a day or two. Jolly good thing, too! Your Yankee friend seems to have been making an awful mess——"

Before he could add any useful information, Grace had risen impulsively to her feet, directing a glance at him that blazed with hatred. Without another word she wheeled abruptly and disappeared through the French windows of the writing room, leaving the agent sucking feverishly on two straws which he had plunged into his iced drink. As the level of the liquid lowered the tide of red reached his eyebrows, and he murmured querulously:

"Now what the blooming purgatory have I done?" Then he exploded. "They *are* mad! The whole crowd of them! They *are* mad!"

GRACE CALHOUN had no sooner vanished through the door, than she scuttled across the lobby, and headed for a window that opened upon the veranda near Colfax's table. But quick as she was, she was too slow. Colfax had already slunk down the stairs again and clambered into a rickshaw that instantly whirled him away.

Frightened by an intuition of danger, without a moment's hesitation, Grace followed down the stairs, stepped into a rickshaw, and set out in pursuit.

First she went to Colfax's office, and found it deserted. Then she went to his hotel, and learned that he had not returned. Dismissing the rickshaw, she walked slowly toward the confectionery shop, when suddenly she spied him. He was walking straight ahead, indifferent to everything, his face pale, his eyes fixed. Grace boldly overtook him, and caught him by the arm.

"All right!" grunted Colfax, coming out of a trance, with a violent start. "You've got me!"

"Yes," said Grace; "and I'm going to hold on to you until you explain yourself!"

"Oh! Oh, it's you!"

"What's the matter?"

"Why—eh—nothing!"

"Con, tell me what's the matter!"

"N-nothing! I've been walking out by the Race Course. It's a long walk, you know—and I think—why, it must be a touch of the sun! Awful headache—and sort of dizzy, you know. Did you ever feel that way? Brains going wishy-washy, and little burning spots in front of the eyes——"

"Oh, poor boy! You *must* be careful. We'll go in here and get something cool."

The meeting, and Grace's sympathy, bucked Colfax up quite a bit. He lost much of his loneliness, though occasionally he was oppressed with the feeling that after all this was only a momentary putting off of permanent ostracism and complete disaster. Fleeting thoughts of his impending loss made Grace seem inexpressibly dear. He became garrulous; he ate his ice-cream feverishly; then he would slump suddenly into moody silence, though continuing to gulp down the cold refreshment. They played hide-and-seek with their eyes, he wondering if she suspected anything of the truth, and she trying to find it out. At this game Colfax won, at least until he succeeded in placing Grace once more in a rickshaw. But as she moved away, she turned her head with a jerk and looked back, and discovered such an expression of desperation and uncertainty on his face that she became frightened.

Anxiety and compassion instantly overwhelmed her. She felt an almost irresistible impulse to fly back to him and take charge of him. She wanted to marry him!

At the hotel she rushed into her father's room and told him breathlessly that Colfax was in trouble.

"Oh, yes!" said her father, lifting his eyebrows and studying the end of his cigar, while jealousy and a pleasant sort of satisfaction struggled within him. "Oh, yes!

He would be! What did he tell you?"

"You know *he* didn't tell me anything!"

"How do I know?" said her father, gloomily resentful. "I didn't even know he was still hanging around. I told you he annoyed me."

Nevertheless, F. P. Calhoun, like most men of his type, was ruled by his women.

"If you don't help him——" threatened Grace with glittering eyes.

"Now, listen, Grace, I want you to have a little dignity. What do you care about this boy, anyway? You can't go running around wasting sympathy on young ignoramuses——"

"If you don't do something——"

"How the devil can I do anything?" shouted Mr. Calhoun with sudden exasperation, jerking out his watch. "I've got to catch the train for Peking immediately. It's impossible for me to wait. They're expecting my decision to-night. Anyway, how do you know what he's been up to? Why—why, he may have been doing all sorts of things! No! I'm dashed if I've got time to waste——"

"If you don't," said Grace coldly, walking toward the door, "I'll marry him to-morrow morning."

Calhoun rose out of his chair as though a pin had been jabbed into him, his eyes bulging, his face apoplectic, his jaw distended. Grace fled to her room. Her father, recovering himself, bounced after her; but he got no farther than a bolted door and an impenetrable barricade of significant silence. He whispered hoarsely; he assumed the calm dictatorial tone of a just parent; he yelled; he banged on the panels with his fist; and in the end he only succeeded in bringing the servants running up the stairs.

The head boy tactfully reminded him that his car was waiting but the train would not wait. Calhoun looked at him wildly; then in a spasm of rage threw his cigar at him. Nevertheless, he knew the boy was right. Torn away inexorably, he had to leave his daughter's door. It was too late even to telephone the consulate or to write a letter. Grace had intended to drive with him to the train. There remained no one, therefore, to whom he could confide a message, since his secretary was waiting for him in Peking.

Besides his secretary, a whole coterie of international bankers and diplomats were waiting for him. His final opinion in regard to the Multiple Power Loan was expected to be decisive. To a certain degree the fate of the nation depended upon his decision, since politics had suddenly become inextricably involved with the financial situation.

As he descended the stairs, with his mind clouded with agitating thoughts and his heart swollen with bitterness, he felt almost sorry that he had a daughter. As he passed out of the doorway a determined young voice called after him:

"Remember! If you don't do something —I will!"

CALHOUN'S neck swelled somewhat and his eyes drew closer together, but he stepped into the car without another word. All at once he felt how much better it would be to be a young man again, and in trouble!

Colfax, for his part, would not have agreed with him.

After leaving Grace he had returned to his room and thought over his situation again. It was so simple it was almost ludicrous. When the first shock passed, he became surly. After a while he realized there had been nothing criminal in his conduct; but though morally innocent, he was equally certain that they would brand him as a dangerous fool, a hopeless incompetent, or a potential crook. His chances were ended in North China.

Defiantly he went down and ate dinner alone. Afterward he went up on the balcony, and looking down upon the lively street smoked a cigarette in moody silence.

Rickshaws were bowling along, carrying passengers to the little theater around the corner; groups and couples strolled by in the balmy coolness of the evening; low voices, sudden bursts of laughter, singing, rose up to him tantalizingly.

His loneliness gave place to wildness. Trapped, he wanted to escape. Currents of unrest, like charges of electricity, poured through him. He had gone straight, done his best, and failed. All at once he wanted to break loose. He thought of his lost Grace, and wailed. There is a great deal of madness in all young men, and it came out in Colfax now.

In this mood he struck a match to light

another cigarette. The flame illumined his face for an instant, so that it was clearly visible from the street. A clear musical voice, full of friendly mockery and laughing invitation, exclaimed:

"Why, there's my stranger again!"

Colfax's heart gave a great thump. Flicking out the match, he leaned far over the railing, tremulous with excitement. There were several rickshaws in a group. The panting coolies, mopping their brows, indicated that they had come by on the run.

"Who is it, kiddie?" said a low voice vibrant with a bacchanal quality.

"I wish I knew," responded the first in a pronounced whisper. "He's like my lost Willie!"

"Hello!" blurted Colfax. "You mean me?"

"Yes, dearie," drawled a third. "She means you."

"We're going for a ride out Race Course Road," said the first. "Supper afterward! I know who you are; so if you want to come——"

"Wait a minute!"

Without stopping for his hat Colfax made for the stairs, his mind on fire, his nerves tingling.

As he reached the head of the stairs suddenly he thought of Grace. He stopped with a jerk, swearing under his breath. He stood there uncertainly biting his nails, thinking. He said to himself, "Oh, hell! I don't care!" and started down the stairs. He reached the landing and began chewing his nails again. He sighed. He swore. The emotional struggle made him feel almost sick. Gradually he found himself headed upstairs again, and very slowly and slightly despondently he walked back to the balcony.

Leaning over the railing, he called down with an attempt at flippancy:

"Can't do it! My wife won't let me!"

The shout of laughter that responded to this drowned another voice behind Colfax; but when he turned he discovered a Chinese house-boy repeating impatiently:

"Telephone! Marster Colfarx! Telephone!"

If Colfax had gone straight out of the hotel, he would have missed that call.

He went to the telephone reluctantly, all his previous depression coming back to him with renewed force. The possibility of the new manager, Macon, having arrived sooner than he had expected came to him with a chilling shock.

"Hello!" he said huskily, and was answered by continued buzzing and distant whispers. This confused him, and began to add exasperation to his dim fears. At last he was able to make out:

"Colfax! C-o-l-f-a-x! Mr. Colfax! Why can't I get him? I never knew such scandalous service! He's there, I tell you!"

"This is Colfax," said that young man breathlessly.

"Oh! Well, this is Mr. Calhoun—Calhoun, at Peking. Grace told me you're in some sort of a fix. What's the matter? What's the trouble, anyway?"

"I didn't say a thing to Grace! Nothing's the matter!"

"Is Grace there?" demanded Calhoun vehemently.

"No. Certainly not!"

"Now, look here!" The thin buzzing syllables somehow gave the impression of an angry shout. "Don't play the fool, Colfax. Don't be a young ass! I—want—to—know—what's—wrong!"

"It's your blamed fault!" exclaimed Colfax with sudden resentment.

"What!"

"You told me on board ship that business was just common sense. All a fellow had to do was buy cheap and sell at a profit. Well, I've been selling at a profit, and now I'm stuck——"

"Colfax, don't be absurd."

"Don't be absurd! All right! I'll not stop to ask *your* advice again!"

"WAIT a minute! Wait a minute!" exclaimed Calhoun in a sort of panic. Then, forcing his voice into plaintive, querulous accents, he added: "Don't you understand I called you up because I wanted to help you? I've just finished my business up here, and I'll be free for the next few days. If there's anything I can do I want to do it."

In the warmth of this apparently disinterested sympathy Colfax instantly melted. Choking in an effort to express his appreciation, he was unable to explain clearly what was wrong. He could only make it clear that the trouble lay in the exchange.

"Ah!" said Calhoun in a cold voice. "You got burnt?"

"How could I tell? I opened a tael

account at the bank because I knew the customs were paid in taels, and I supposed that that showed the tael was the national standard. But my collections were in dollars; and when I sent around to have the amount figured back into dollars so as to check up with my collections, I found I was over six thousand dollars short!"

"Oh, yes! Naturally——"

"Naturally! Why, it's the damnedest, most *un*natural thing I ever heard of!" Colfax's voice was almost tearful. "Why should they take six thousand dollars from me? All I wanted back was the money I put in! The new manager's coming to-morrow, and how am I going to prove I'm not a crook?"

"Have you withdrawn your money?" demanded Calhoun crisply.

"No. What good would that be?"

"Listen! Don't withdraw your taels! Do you get that? Don't withdraw your taels! No matter what happens, don't withdraw those taels until the new manager asks for them."

"But I'll have to show him something."

"Not until to-morrow afternoon. Make no mistake about that! Don't withdraw those taels until you have to. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Something has happened——"

At this point something else happened. The wire began to buzz and hum in such a fashion that it was impossible for Colfax to catch another syllable. He had a dim impression that his adviser was roaring loudly into the telephone; but after trying vainly for half an hour to restore the connection, Colfax gave it up and went to bed.

BY TEN o'clock in the morning, Colfax, with admirable restraint, had tidied the office desk, given orders for the day, and mysteriously disappeared.

At one o'clock the mail train drew into the station, and Macon, the new manager, swung into the waiting crowd and looked keenly about. There was no one to receive him. Indignant, and feeling a vague anxiety, he left his luggage to the care of his interpreter, sprang into a rickshaw and rode immediately around to the office.

Macon was solidly built, but stood the heat well. His full face was dry and tan, and his gray eyes darted lively glances through silver-rimmed spectacles. He looked like a cheerful, good-natured man who might be very dangerous if annoyed.

As Macon entered the compound where the offices of the Universal Trading Company were located, the agent spotted him and came over to meet him, having known him before in Tientsin. Wang-Li was also on hand, hissing and rubbing his hands with delight. But Colfax was nowhere to be found.

"Where is he, Wang-Li?" asked Macon.

"I don't know, sir. He left here at ten o'clock this morning. He did not tell me where he was going."

A curious expression flitted across the agent's countenance.

"What do you know?" demanded Macon.

"Jolly little!"

"Wang-Li, get the list of sales and the total collections." When Wang-Li had left the room, Macon turned to the agent and said abruptly: "Now, let's have the dirt! What the devil have you people been up to!"

"I want to know what the ruddy purgatory *you* people have been up to! This young blighter comes in here one day with a perfectly correct order from Shanghai to empty my godown of all your stock. And he does it—every rotten case. Two days before, Sanford had slipped off to Shanghai. I washed my hands of it."

"*Hai-yah!* What about his deposits?"

"I tell you I don't know a thing—except that he hasn't put a dollar in the Hongkong Bank, your regular depository."

In his excitement, Macon rose from the chair where he was sitting, and at that moment the door opened and Colfax slipped in, with a startled, somewhat wild, expression.

"Ah!" said Macon, as though he had made a capture. "You're Colfax!"

"Right the first time," said Colfax. "My guess is you're Macon."

"You gentlemen know each other?" asked Macon defensively. Colfax and the agent glowered at each other and grunted.

"Well, Colfax," continued the new manager, frowning at the end of a pencil, "what's been going on here?"

Colfax shifted uncomfortably.

"If you don't mind," he said with embarrassment, "I'd like you to wait till to-morrow, and then I'll give you a report to cover everything."

"Why can't you do it now?" said Macon, startled.

"Why, I can—but—well, I'd *rather*——"

At this moment Wang-Li returned with the lists and placed them unostentatiously in front of Macon. Macon glanced at the totals and pursed his lips.

"That looks fine! But what about your deposits?"

"I was just saying," Colfax reminded him, "that I'd *rather* wait until to-morrow——"

"Yes. But *I'd* rather see the total right now, if you don't mind."

"Well, you see——"

"No, I don't see it at all. Why can't you show me the total right now? You know it, don't you?"

"Oh, the devil! Yes, I know it. It shows a shortage of about six thousand dollars!"

This announcement was followed by a deadly silence. Macon looked as though Colfax had hit him on the head with a club. His glasses fogged, and he wilted into his chair. The agent's jaw dropped, and he glanced wildly about as though searching for handcuffs. Wang-Li rubbed his hands on his thighs, shifted his feet, and hissed nervously. Colfax himself looked merely absent-minded.

"Well," he said, coming out of his abstraction, "I'll go around to the bank, then, and transfer the account before they close up."

He was out of the door before Macon recovered himself.

"I should have gone with him, I suppose," he said plaintively.

"Rather!" said the agent dryly.

"Good Lord, you don't think he's crooked?"

The agent tapped his forehead.

"Balmy!" he said tersely.

Time slipped by. The closing hour at the bank came and passed. Macon's anxiety became a conflagration. He began to think of the men he had known who had defaulted after brief and amazing orgies. Such adventures are peculiarly easy in China, though they invariably end tragically. He called up the bank. The officials had already gone home, and the few remaining clerks could tell him nothing of Colfax.

The agent suggested that they immediately start a search.

This suggestion was just sufficient to complete Macon's panic. The two men started for the door. And collided with Colfax coming in.

"Oh!" said Macon. "We were just going for a cup of tea."

"Sorry," said Colfax, "I should have thought of that. I had mine."

"YOU had yours!" exclaimed Macon furiously. "You left us waiting here—and you went and had tea! My God! Where's the money, then?"

"That's right," said Colfax cheerfully; "I almost forgot about that." The two men looked at Colfax with strange fascination, as he proceeded to feel in his pockets with a dreamy expression in his eyes. Once or twice he sighed, and at each sigh the two winced. Finally he exclaimed brightly, "Ah, here it is!"

He handed Macon a certified check for $102,208.

"But this," said Macon faintly, "shows a surplus of over four thousand dollars!"

"Yes. Oh, yes! Yes, that's right. That's additional profit. You see, when the Multiple Power Loan was withdrawn, why, naturally the value of the tael went up. So I—well, I took advantage of the exchange and made a little additional profit for the Company——"

"What! But how did you know? The news has only just come out."

"Mr. Calhoun phoned me last night."

"Mr. Calhoun phoned you! My God! Why—*why* did he phone *you?*"

"Well, why shouldn't he? I'm going to marry his daughter."

The agent slipped silently out of the door, taking long strides on tiptoe. A look of utter silliness came into Macon's face; and the only words he could think of were:

"Doesn't—doesn't the old man object?"

"Why, no! Why should he? I'm all right, aren't I? Don't you suppose I can support a wife on what I ought to get here?"

"That," said Macon hollowly, with a weak gesture, "is of no importance—since F. P. Calhoun is worth about twenty-five million dollars—and Grace Calhoun is his only child."

Romance, Adventure, Intrigue

Kildare of the Border

Trickery Overreaches Itself in a Duel in Old Mexico—Emperor Maximilian, in All His Splendor, Feels the Force of American Determination—Annetta Works Out an Intrigue of Her Own

By John T. McIntyre

Author of "Blowing Weather"

Illustrations by Charles Hargens

Begin this serial with any instalment. The story is here up to this issue.

ROMANCE in old Mexico City of the late sixties! And adventure! Kildare was ready for all that might come his way. Confederate General Magruder, pursued by Phil Sheridan, had crossed the border into Mexico; and General Sheridan had sent Tom Kildare with a dispatch to Emperor Maximilian demanding that the Confederate forces be disarmed. Unimpressed by the imperial splendor, calmly surveying the display of armed strength in foreign uniforms which supported the throne, Kildare encountered in the Hotel Europe Colonel Rayon, whose scheme to make off with innocent, young Annetta Prentiss he had thwarted in Espirito Santo. Now bad feeling flamed up again and the Mexican challenged to a duel by moonlight.

With his new friend Glade, Tom Kildare was waiting his opponent when they were foully taken from ambush and had to escape as best they could. Running under the trees, with pursuit close upon him, Kildare came to a high wall, which he managed to spring up and over. Out of breath he stood listening while his pursuers rushed by. Not until he heard voices in the garden did he realize where he was—in the garden of Annetta's uncle and guardian, Simon Prentiss.

Prentiss was an old rascal, Kildare well knew, now in the service of the empire, and he was surprised at being received as an expected guest and at being left in the presence of Annetta with an encouraging hint toward love-making. But Annetta had been in Kildare's dreams ever since he had first seen her in St. Joe, Missouri, and he was willing enough. Then he had the explanation from her own lips: her uncle had taken as evidence that she had compromised herself, a note from the emissary of the Austrian emperor, Colonel Stahlberg, who had fallen deeply in love with her. And Prentiss had seized the chance to force through a marriage of immense advantage to himself.

Only when old Simon returned, did he discover that he had encouraged the wrong man, the man with whom his niece was really in love. Kildare had to depart hastily, but only after promising to return.

THE following morning Lieutenant Glade, late of the Confederate service, sat smoking a cigar, and with a cup of black coffee before him, when Kildare was shown into his quarters.

"Hello, old chap!" greeted the young Southerner as he shook hands with his visitor. "I'm glad to see you." He examined the trooper carefully, and added in a tone of relief: "Not a mark that I can see. You had luck on your side."

Kildare's eyes went to the bandage about the other's arm.

"How does that little reminder feel this morning?" he inquired.

"It's nothing but a scratch; old Doc Gibson fixed it up." Here the young Confederate ordered more coffee and shoved the cigars toward Kildare. "I'm breakfasting," said he. "Have some."

When the two were engaged comfortably with their tobacco and the coffee, Glade proceeded:

"When I heard the shots popping back of me after I'd ridden away last night, I thought it was all up with you, Kildare. Once I tried to turn and go back; but it was all I could do to hold onto my horse. Then I got a confused notion that I'd get help somewhere. And, by the merest chance in the world, I ran into a dozen fellows I knew, not more than a mile away. They rode toward the Prentiss place at top speed. But, so I heard later, they found everything quiet; the only thing unusual was your riderless horse, which they brought along."

"I give them a thousand thanks," said Kildare, heartily. "Sure, it was a glad sight for my two eyes when I saw Pepper this morning, as frisky as you please."

"DON'T get the notion in your head that these Europeans and Mexicans turn all their affairs of honor into attempts at assassination," said Glade. He leaned back in a woven-grass chair and blew a long cloud of smoke at the ceiling. "I've been concerned in more than one in the two months I've been here, and this is the first that's turned out so."

"I'm glad to hear that," said the cavalryman, dryly. "For I'd hate to carry away the impression of them that's been in my mind these last few hours."

"But, I say," said Glade, "tell us the rest of it. What happened after I left?"

Thereupon Kildare related the experience which had befallen him. Glade listened with marveling and exclaiming attention; and when the Northerner had finished, the young Confederate struck the table a blow that made the cups jump.

"Now, there," he cried, admiringly, "is a situation that's almost perfect. It has every necessary thing—surprise—excitement and continued suspense."

"I'm accustomed to surprises," said Kildare, "and as for excitement, any man who has gone through the war just done has had his fill of that. But, sure, 'tis the suspense that bothers me." He leaned toward Glade. "How safe is the girl? And who the divil is the man they were expecting?"

Glade gazed at the speaker after the manner of a man who is formulating a reassuring reply; but in the midst of it a change came into his face; with his eyes full of excitement, he leaped up.

"I have it! By Jove, I have it!"

He paced the room, his right fist striking again and again into the palm of his left hand. Kildare looked at him in surprise.

"You have what?" asked he.

"The identity of the man in question. As a gambling chance, I'd lay ten to one that I'm right. It's the Austrian Stahlberg."

"The fellow who was with Grant, representing his government?"

"The same. And who now, if the whispers I've heard are correct, represents his government in a private capacity in Mexico."

"But what makes you think he might be the man I speak of?"

"I have more reasons than one." He sat down again. "And the things building up to and supporting those reasons are far-reaching. Listen! This Mexican whelp, Rayon, who challenged you and then tried to have you murdered by bravos, is one of the cunningest plotters in Central America. And inside that head of his, along with much other devilment, he has a plan for Mexican supremacy which is rather astounding; also rather possible. Money and military power are needed to carry this on. The French are committed to a policy of Mexican exploitation; but Rayon desires Austria also to come in, and to this end Stahlberg would be most useful."

"But how," said Kildare, "does this touch the matter of last night?"

"Give me a moment," said Glade. "I

think I can make it plain to you. Stahlberg is in love with old Prentiss' niece. Whenever she appears on the street he follows her like a shadow. The whole matter has amused those who have noticed it; for the girl's brother, you see, is perhaps his only close friend."

"But still," frowned Kildare, "he writes notes; he carries on the matter in an underhanded way."

"It may be," said Glade, "that his intentions were of the best; on the other hand"—the young Confederate shrugged his shoulders, meaningly—"the ideas of Continental Europe in such things are not ours, and so you can take your choice. But no matter which you take, it works out in accord with my explanation. Old Prentiss is hand and glove with Rayon. To gain the weight of Austria in their plot they must have the favor of Stahlberg. What better way than marry Prentiss' niece to him? Once in the family he would, more than likely, fall in with their views."

There was a grim look about Kildare's usually good-humored mouth.

"FAITH! Old boy, if you've got it right," he said, "there's more to the thing than I thought. Instead of being a series of mistakes by a malicious and blundering old man, it's a plot in which Annetta Prentiss is one of the pawns."

"Right," said Glade. "It makes her precisely that."

Kildare arose, went to the window and glanced into the busy street; he stood there for a few moments, his brows drawn and his strong fingers fumbling with the butt of the big revolver in his holster. For he was essentially a man of action; if the problem at hand had been one to be solved by a quick blow, Kildare would have solved it on the spot. But, instead, it was of a kind that required caution; it needed to be approached with care, perhaps temporized with. And as Kildare saw this plainer and plainer, his frown grew darker, the grim look about his mouth became more pronounced.

"The old man is her guardian, and has a certain authority," he said. "And, aside from that, there must be the divil's own influence among them with the government."

"A great deal," said Glade. "So much that you can hardly hope to prevent, by legal means, anything they have made up their minds to do."

The hands of the Celt clenched.

"Then I'll pay no heed to legal means," said he, and there was a pleased note in his voice at the prospect. "If they have the cards stacked, why, all right. That happens to be a game I know something about; and I'll match myself against them with great pleasure."

Glade, who had also arisen, slapped him upon the back.

"Good!" ejaculated he. "That's the talk. But"—a shade of seriousness coming into his manner—"you'll have to be a little careful. None of us are very welcome here in Mexico; give them a chance and they'll—" He finished the sentence with a gesture.

"Faith, and I've noticed that little weakness," smiled Kildare. Now that the matter of his procedure, at least, was plain to him, he grew good-humored once more. "Any one from beyond the Rio Grande is as popular here as the rheumatism. But make yourself easy, old chap; it's the fox I'll be imitating; divil the hair of the wolf will I show until the time comes to strike."

The two young men talked earnestly for some time.

"Our General Magruder is the man for us," said Lieutenant Glade, at last; "he stands with his ear closer to the subterranean affairs of Maximilian's court than is generally known. I'll speak to him today; and more than likely he'll be able to throw some light upon what you have to expect."

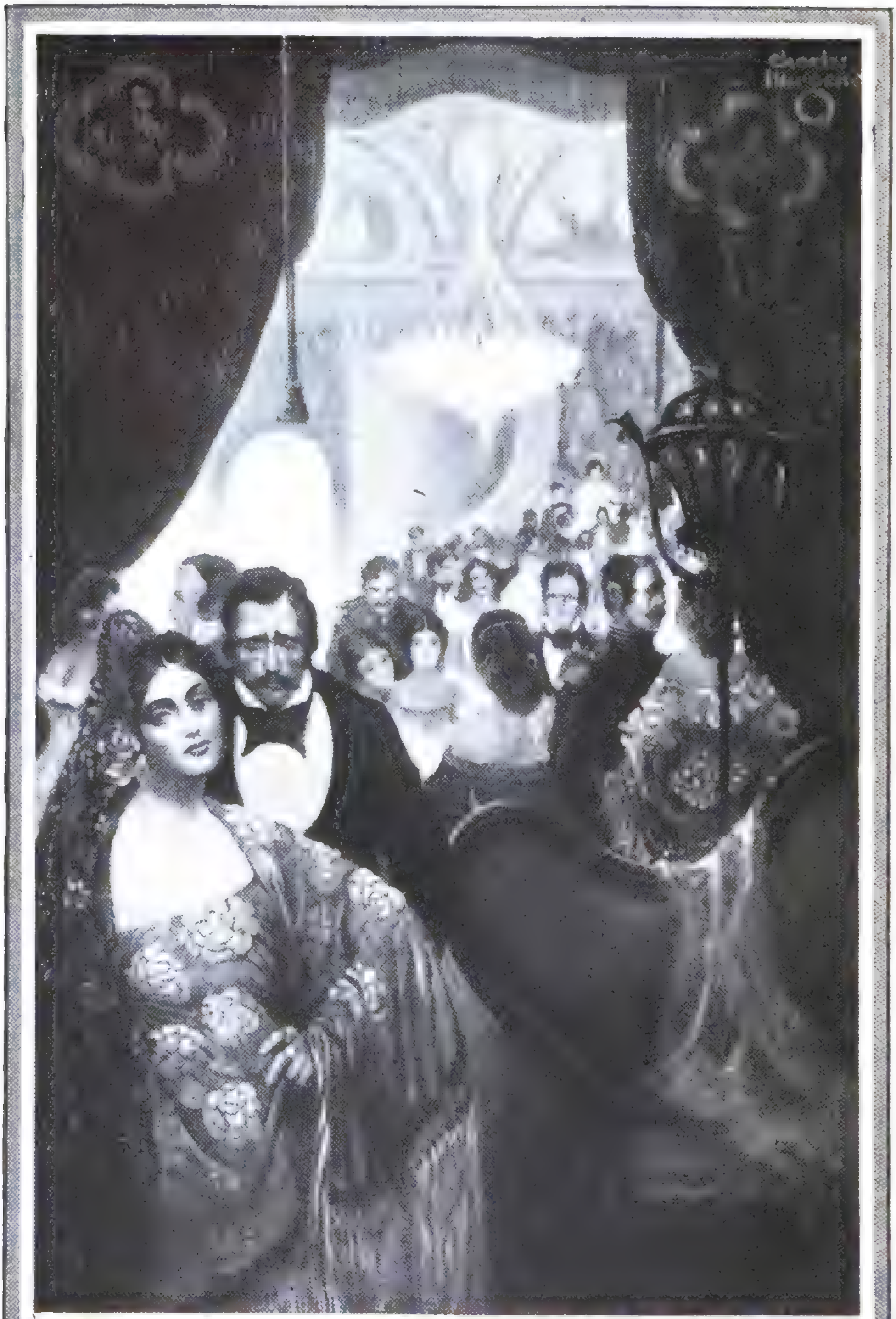
"That's it," said Kildare, gripping the other's hand. "A little foreknowledge sometimes spells success. Thank you, Glade. I've always known that Early's men were the divil's own fighters; but now I know they've big hearts in their bodies as well."

NEXT afternoon as Kildare dismounted in front of his lodging place, a peon whom he had engaged to take care of things said to him:

"The señor is waiting for you, inside."

Kildare found Glade tilted back in a chair and with his feet upon the window sill.

"I've been encamped here, burning up your tobacco, for an hour," said the Southerner. "There's some news for you."



Cortizar was no match for the woman. "Little favors!" he said. "What are they? They are nothing; and beauty must be pleased."

"Good, I hope," said Kildare.

"General Magruder's secretary— Remember, I mentioned the general yesterday? Well, the secretary is a smart young chap from New Orleans, who picks up a great deal of information just by keeping his eyes and ears open. He has found this out for you: In spite of the misadventure of the other night, Stahlberg is in the net of the conspirators. He is so in love with the girl that he is like wax in their hands; and they are preparing to take advantage of the fact without loss of time."

"How?" asked Kildare.

"They plan to have a sort of public betrothal; as far as the girl is concerned it is a rascally thing to do; but this crew of plotters care nothing for that, for their object is to so entangle the Austrian that he'll afterwards be unable to retreat even should he be inclined to do so."

"A public betrothal? How is that to be managed?" asked the other.

"You have not been long enough in the city, I suppose, to have visited the Casino," said Glade. "Well, it's a place fashioned after the European gambling establishments; a beautiful location, a palace-like building, every show of wealth, patronized by the élite. Fortunes are lost and won there in a night. It is the place to go. Every one of consequence in Mexico City must be seen there at least once a week or, after a fashion, lose caste. The money behind the establishment is supplied by Cortizar, counselor to the Emperor; but the active spirit of the place is the Frenchwoman Theresa Reuchard. Old Simon Prentiss proposes to be present at the Casino with his niece to-morrow night. The others will contrive that Stahlberg also be there. The rest will be easy."

Kildare smiled. "But the girl," he said. "What of her? She will not submit."

Glade gestured and shook his head.

"What else can she do? This is Mexico. Here a guardian's power is unlimited. She will be in the midst of enemies—and alone!"

Again Kildare smiled; but there was a look in his eyes which fighting men of the trails had long ago come to know; and he hitched his belt about, bringing the big revolver nearer to his hand.

"She will be in the midst of enemies," he said. "I don't doubt that. But don't worry, old chap, she will not be alone."

THE Europeans were leading the fashionable advance in Mexico City at that time, as well as the military; and the European idea of fashionable diversion was the most widely followed. The Casino stood on a hillside: it had been established in a large stone building, flat-roofed, with carved doorways, verandas and balconies, much after the manner of old houses in the south of Spain. Handsome grounds surrounded it, a fountain of clear water gushed among the trees.

Gaily dressed people thronged the verandas and rooms, beautiful women in the latest Paris modes, officers in glittering uniforms, Mexicans in gorgeous native dress. The lights were brilliant, falling through the thousand glass pendants of the chandeliers, and reflected by the tall mirrors, and the polished floors. In the great salon the wheel whirled, men and women staked their money, the monotonous voices of the functionaries droned their calls, gold coins chinked and glittered; white shoulders were shrugged, diamonds shone whitely, smiles and bows and easy manners were everywhere beside despair, and dull hope, and frantic eagerness.

The active spirit in this peculiarly Continental establishment was Theresa Reuchard; but Cortizar, a half-blood, once the most rapacious of Mexico's political spoilsmen, whose vast wealth had been wrested from him by the revolution, and restored by the empire, provided the money which carried it on. Cortizar was now the Emperor's counselor, and he was old. The flashing eyes and compelling beauty of the Frenchwoman had captivated him; but Theresa was shrewd, and played him carefully. Rayon's preferment in the imperial army came through her influence with Cortizar, and Rayon's increasing influence in the civil government had its beginning in the same way. Cortizar, doddering, senile, cunning, was no match for the woman.

"Little favors!" he would say. "What are they? They are nothing; and beauty must be pleased."

But there was none of these little favors but had a political significance which the infatuated old ruffian never dreamed of; the shadows cast by the influences whose growth he was feeding were cleverly hidden from him. Theresa's activities at the Casino were equally well managed; though her hand was everywhere in its conduct, the hand was seldom seen; among the patrons of the place she was one of them.

Upon this particular night at the resort, the young Austrian, Stahlberg, handsome and athletic-looking in his evening clothes, sat in a corner of one of the verandas with a tall, narrow glass of a favored French wine on a table beside him. There was a smile in his eyes and on his mouth, and he looked with favor at the gay, high-colored throngs clustered in the gaming rooms and promenading under the trees, sipping now and then at his wine, and smoking a good Cuban cigar. A step sounded near him; looking up, he saw young Stuart Prentiss. He arose at once, his hand held out with some eagerness.

"PRENTISS," he said, "you are the very person I most wished to see."

Stuart Prentiss shook his hand and then sat down on the opposite side of the little table; and after a second tall glass took its place beside the first, he said:

"I've also been wanting to see you. But I haven't been able to manage it. This is a lucky chance; I hadn't expected you'd be here to-night."

"I spoke to your uncle about you, once or twice in the last few days," said Stahlberg. "But he said you had left his house, and that he had no idea of your whereabouts." Then, seeing the look in the other's face, he added: "Yes; I have met the old gentleman. And I'll frankly say I was surprised. You had given him a pretty shabby recommendation, but I found him to be kindly and very well disposed."

Stuart Prentiss leaned back in his chair surprised, nodding his head.

"I've been afraid these hawks would fasten their talons in you," he said. "And now I warn you to take care. Do you recall what I said to you the other day—that as long as you disliked Vicente Rayon—and in that I included all of his peculiar group—you'd be safe from them? You agreed with me, then, but you seem to have recently changed your mind."

Stahlberg placed his hand on the young man's arm.

"My friend," he said, "we can all be mistaken. Consider, now: don't you think you are so in this? Might not your judgment of these people be ill founded? For example: On a closer view of this Frenchwoman, Theresa Reuchard, I find her not only beautiful, but of much ability and talent. Also I see that Rayon is an able soldier and a man of many generous impulses."

"I have known for some time that they were anxious to get your interest," said Stuart Prentiss, "and I felt sure they'd use every lure at their disposal. What they have done"—he regarded his friend with troubled eyes—"I do not know; but whatever it was, it seems to have been very successful."

"SOME day," said Stahlberg, twisting the points of his blond mustache, "you will realize you have been much too harsh with these people. I find them—as I find your uncle—helpful and well intentioned."

"When I see you putting confidence in a man like my uncle, I know you are in deep water, indeed." The young American's eyes narrowed, and he leaned across the table. "So you think him well intentioned and helpful, do you? What has he done to convince you of that?"

There was a moment's silence; and then the Austrian said:

"Something has come to me, that some day comes to most men. I have met the girl I desire to marry. And in this matter the uncle whom you so denounce has been surprisingly kind. And for that, could I be anything less than grateful?"

At this Stuart Prentiss sat very still. A thought had come to him like a shock. He felt a dull, heavy pulsing of blood at each side of his head; the arteries in his neck seemed swollen; his nerves had suddenly tightened, and hummed with a vague alarm.

"You have met the girl you desire to marry," he said. "And my uncle has been of service to you in the matter." His voice seemed strange and thin, and far away in his own ears. And there was fear in it. "Tell me: Who is this girl? What is her name?"

There was another short silence. Stahlberg was awkward and embarrassed. But then he spoke.

"I suppose, Prentiss, according to all the usual conventions, I should have mentioned this to you some time ago. For, you see, it's a thing that very intimately concerns you."

Stuart Prentiss felt the dull pulsing in his arteries grow painful; the humming along his nerve lines became a torture.

"Why," he asked, "does it concern me?"

"Because the girl," said Stahlberg, "is your sister."

There was a blur before young Prentiss' eyes; and there was a roaring in his ears. A lure! He knew they'd use one to entrap the Austrian, and he'd wondered what it would be. And it was his sister! It was Annetta! All her life long she had been to him a sweet and fragrant thing—spotless, white, like a young nun. Then this drab old uncle had pronounced her shamed—he had bid her hang her head. And she had not denied the thing he said against her. The young man had never thought to go through so dark and despairing a thing; his mind was dulled, his soul sick; he felt at the time that nothing in life could be worse.

But, now—a lure! She—poor shamed thing—was being used as a bait to entangle a man who was his friend! He saw the credulous, love-blinded Austrian made the dupe of a group of plotters; he saw Annetta, good—he'd swear that at the feet of God Himself, no matter what had befallen her—used to entice a man to his ruin! This was more than he could stand; his shaking hands went to his face, and he moved away. Stahlberg looked after him in wonder.

WHEN a man holds fixedly to a single thought, all other matters touched by his mind take the color and quality of the thing that controls him. Witness this:

Stuart Prentiss was searching the various groups in the salon with hot, swift eyes when he felt a touch upon his arm. And when he turned he saw Tom Kildare.

"Why, then," said Kildare, "I'm glad to see you again. More than once since I came here I've wondered what had become of you."

Young Prentiss shook his hand.

"I've wanted to thank you ever since that night when you so stood my friend," he said.

"Don't speak of it," said the Celt. "It was a small enough matter, and cost but a few bullets, more or less." He regarded the young man with a good-humored look that held something of shrewdness in it. "You mentioned your uncle that night," he said, "as you talked to the Mexican; and your words were not quite complimentary. Well, sure, since then I've met the old gentleman, and I can bear you out in all you said. Divil such another old rip have I ever seen in all my travels." The Irishman cocked his eye at the other, and the shrewd look increased. "Is he here to-night, at all?" he asked.

"I believe so."

"And is your sister with him?"

There was a swift eagerness in this that caught Stuart's attention; and the glance he gave Kildare held a trace of coldness.

"I do not know," he said, briefly.

They talked for a few moments longer, and then separated. Young Prentiss continued his search among the throngs in the gaming salon, intent, and with the same burning eyes. Kildare amused himself for a space watching the play in the salon; then he passed out upon one of the broad verandas; and there, some distance away, standing near a window, he saw Annetta.

BUT Señora Marquez stood diligently at her side, and Kildare did not approach; he stepped out of the light and stood waiting in the shadows of some vines.

"Señorita," said Señora Marquez—and the Celt was too distant to catch the words—"why do you watch people so as they pass to and fro in the rooms?"

"They are so gay and careless," said the girl. "And they seem so happy."

Regarding her closely, the elder woman shook her head.

"It is not their gaiety, nor yet their happiness that makes you watch so," she said. "Señorita, your eyes are seeking some one. All day your heart has been whispering to you—I could almost hear it—and the words it speaks are of this stranger from the north."

"He said he would come for me," said the girl. "He said it boldly—before them all. And I am sure he will keep his word."

"I am amazed, señorita," said Señora Marquez, "that you should keep the image of this wild soldier so in your mind. What of this other young man—this Austrian whom your good uncle has selected to be your husband?"

The girl's head was held high; and her eyes were full of spirit.

"I do not know your Austrian," she said.

"I do not want to know him. I will not have him forced upon me."

"You are very outspoken with your 'wills' and your 'will not's," said Señora Marquez. "But, remember, child, you are not in St. Louis, now, nor in any of those northern places. A young girl like you cannot say 'I will' or 'I will not' here as she can in the American states. Your uncle is a subject of Maximilian, now; and he is your guardian. And it is for him to say who is to be your husband, not you."

"But I do not love this Austrian, señora; I thought him amusing, that is all."

"Not love him!" said the older woman. "Not love him! What nonsense is this! Not one woman in a thousand loves her husband. Put such expectations from your mind."

The girl made no reply to this; she turned from the window and moved along the veranda, leaving Señora Marquez to watch the gay throng within. Annetta walked very slowly, with bent head, her hands clasped before her. And when she was in the shadows cast by the climbing vines, Kildare spoke.

"You seem sad, señorita," he said.

THE girl looked up, startled; she saw the dark loom of a figure in the shadow, but could not make out who it was.

"Only a few moments ago," said Kildare, "I spoke to your brother and asked if you were here. But he did not know."

She knew the voice now; and the lilt in his speech thrilled her. But she waited for him to speak his name.

"You are awaiting some one," he said.

"No."

"Thinking of some one, then?"

"No."

Kildare stirred in the thick shadow and was now close at her side.

"And yet," he said, "there may be a man somewhere who fancies all your thoughts are for him." There was a little pause. "Girls have short memories," he said.

"Men say such things of them," she replied.

"There was a man once," said Kildare, "who dared a good deal for a girl, and she promised to be his wife. But in a few days he heard she was to marry some one else."

"He heard!" said the girl. "And did he ask no more than that? Did he believe so serious a thing of her with so little cause?"

"If he had," said Kildare, "it would have cut him to the heart."

There was a little pause; and then Annetta said:

"I think she would be pleased with that."

"Pleased! Because he suffered?"

"Yes. For that, you see, would be proof that he loved her." She reached out; her hand touched him upon the arm. "I know a girl like the one of whom you have just spoken. But she has not broken her word. Instead she is praying in her heart that the man be given courage to keep his. For she is alone. There are evil people all about her; she is in danger."

In an instant Kildare's arms were about her, and his kisses were upon her face. This movement, swift and impulsive, carried them out of the shadow into the light, and at that moment Stuart Prentiss, searching for Annetta, stepped out upon the veranda and saw them. He stopped; white as death and with burning eyes he looked at Tom Kildare, suspicion leaping into his mind. And a mind charged as his was, with grief and the desire for revenge, is fertile soil for such seed as suspicion always carries; it springs up lush and venomous, and sooner or later it bears a deadly flower.

TOM KILDARE talked long and earnestly with Annetta; and then he went swiftly away with the assured manner of one whose road is plain and straight before him. A stolid-looking man stood in the doorway of the grand salon as though awaiting some one, and Kildare paused at his side.

"Ask Lieutenant Glade to see me here, at once," said the Celt.

The stolid man departed without a word; Kildare took up a position in the angle of a tall window and looked about. Quite near him a group of military men were gathered about a table, and a casekeeper unemotionally turned out cards upon which they wagered their money. Duroc, who was among them, yawned in a bored fashion, after repeated failures.

"I don't recall a more tiresome night," said he. "Risking small sums of money has lost any spice of excitement it might once have had, and more especially when the said small sums are almost always lost."

The little hawk-nosed Frenchman, who had been concerned in the fracas in the garden of the Hotel Europe some days before, sat directly facing Kildare, and the expression in the man's sharp, wicked-looking little eyes was of recognition. Now he turned to Duroc, grinning and pulling at the points of his mustache.

"I find it a good deal that way, myself," he said. "But then, perhaps we shall not be forced to depend alone upon the cards for entertainment to-night."

A man with the insignia of a major laughed.

"If you are referring to Stahlberg, you are quite right," he said. "Our enterprising Austrian friend is carrying this matter of his rather swiftly, it seems to me; but let us see what the end shall be."

Again the little man with the hawk-nose grinned. His wicked eyes shot a look toward Kildare as he said:

"There you have it, exactly. We do not know what the end will be; it may be a surprise."

Duroc smiled skeptically.

"And why," asked he, "do you think that?"

There was a wicked derision in the eyes of the little ruffler; the situation seemed to give him the greatest enjoyment.

"You were present at the house of Simon Prentiss on the other night when the northerner paid his visit," said he. "And you heard what he said, did you not? He told us he'd return for the girl?"

"I remember," said Duroc, but he shrugged his disbelief.

"This matter of her betrothal to Stahlberg has leaked out—as it was intended it should—and who knows but Kildare has heard of it? Who knows but it is still in his mind to carry the matter through? And if so, what better chance could he have than to-night?"

Duroc smiled; and with the smile was a sneer.

"You forget," said he, "that this fellow is Irish, and they, like the Americans, are braggarts."

The little warrior cocked his eye at the attentive Kildare; and his joy in the situation increased.

"Ah!" said he, to Duroc. "Make no mistake. The Americans are enterprising. And some of them are quite dangerous."

"They are mongrels," said Duroc, "a mixture of all the bloods of Europe. And mongrels lack backbone. Take that Confederate officer I settled with this morning—Hawkins was his name, I think: He was a captain in rank"—with a sneer. "Perhaps you think he was dangerous."

A HALF dozen steps took Tom Kildare to Duroc's side; his brow was dark as he said: "I knew Hawkins. It's true he was a captain; but also he was only a boy who had hardly got his growth."

Duroc turned his head with the cold, soft motion of a snake.

"You are addressing me?" he asked.

"I am—in the matter of Hawkins of the 12th Texas Infantry. I met him only once, but that once made him my friend. A quarrel was fastened on him yesterday by a practised man-killer." At this Duroc arose, fury in his face; but Kildare went on. "But the boy's pluck wouldn't let him refuse. And so he was murdered."

At this last word all at the table arose.

"Murdered!" said the French major, and he looked at Kildare sternly.

"There is no other word to characterize it," said Kildare. "It was a cold, brutal thing to do; and the man who did it is a crawling snake."

There was a moment's silence; and then Duroc said, evenly:

"Those are harsh words, señor. But you shall have a chance to make them good."

Kildare laughed. "A chance! I have no confidence in that, for I have already figured in a matter in which you took part, and was ambushed by cutthroats."

Duroc bore none too good a name among the better class of his fellows; and the cold looks he saw upon their faces at this, keyed his cold fury to a still higher pitch.

"Then," said he, "you will give me no satisfaction?"

"I will give you any satisfaction you desire," said Kildare; "but I will give you no chance to arrange for my reception as Rayon arranged for it." He pointed through the window. "Outside, there, is a park; as I came through it awhile ago I noticed a very handsome fountain. I have a weapon; you have one also. I will be at the fountain in ten minutes—alone. Will you also be there at that time—alone?"

Duroc regarded the speaker with the reptile-like coldness that is habitual to all practised killers.

"I will," he said. "I accept. It will give me much satisfaction, señor, to take your life under your own conditions."

GLADE had entered while this scene was progressing; and he and Kildare now left the room together. The face of the young Confederate was stern, and his eyes flashed.

"That job which you've taken upon yourself belongs to one of us," he said. "Hawkins was a Southern man, and it is our place to avenge him."

"Pay no heed to that," said Kildare. "There was the chance before me, and divil a bit could I resist it. Let Duroc keep his word, and step out there in range of my shooting iron, and I'll reduce the population of Mexico City by one murdering blackguard, anyway."

"But one of our men should——"

"Will you whist!" interrupted Kildare. "Don't be vexing me." His glance went here and there in the shadow, and he added: "If the lads that were to come with you for this work to-night are here, I'll feel myself well paid for any little thing I'll be doing for them."

"They are here," said Glade. "About twenty of them, all mounted and armed; and every one of them's a wildcat."

"Well, by the looks of some of the omadhauns inside there," said Kildare, "a gang of tearing, fighting boys will be needed. And you find, do you, that they don't mind jumping in and helping out one of Sheridan's men?"

"They are glad of the chance. For you see, old man, they figure we are not Rebs or Yanks down here; we're all Americans!"

The hand of Kildare gripped Glade's shoulder hard.

"That's the talk!" said the Celt. "That's the talk. Faith! There's no one in the world that'd ask better from any man than that."

While they talked, old Simon Prentiss sat in a small room off the grand salon, with Theresa Reuchard; his brows were lowering and his eyes had a bitter look.

"Are we to have our arrangements spoiled by this mad Irishman?" asked old Simon. "Must we submit to the threat of his presence? Are we not to lift a hand to rid ourselves of him?"

"Duroc will look after him," said Theresa, calmly. "You shall see. In a little while, now, we need trouble ourselves no more about him."

But the old man snapped his fingers.

"I have no confidence in Duroc," he said. "He is a matter-of-fact bully who fights by code. This man from the north is of another stripe. He is ingenious, he is full of new methods, he fairly brims with deviltry. Duroc will be a child in his hands."

The Frenchwoman shrugged her shoulders, not agreeing with this; but there was a look of anxiety in her eyes.

"Whatever is done," she said, "we must have no mishaps. The Austrian is necessary to us, and we will never have a better chance for gaining him over than this." Her fingers held many rings; they glittered in the light as she turned a heavy bracelet about on her wrist. "I wish you had spoken of this Kildare sooner," she said.

"I saw him when he entered the Casino," said the old man. "And I was so occupied in watching him that I had no opportunity to send you word." He looked at the woman with his wicked old mouth slightly awry, and a weasel-look in his eyes; and he went on. "Suppose," said he, "it turns out as I expect—that your man Duroc fails in his work? What action do you think of taking then? Shall I bundle my niece into a carriage and run away with her in fear of what this man might do?"

THERESA REUCHARD was a shrewd woman; she knew character. Long before, in other matters that had come up between them, she had noted that Simon Prentiss was seldom at loss; and she had observed, when he seemed most anxious to hear another's views, his mind was wrapped closest about some plan of his own. So she said:

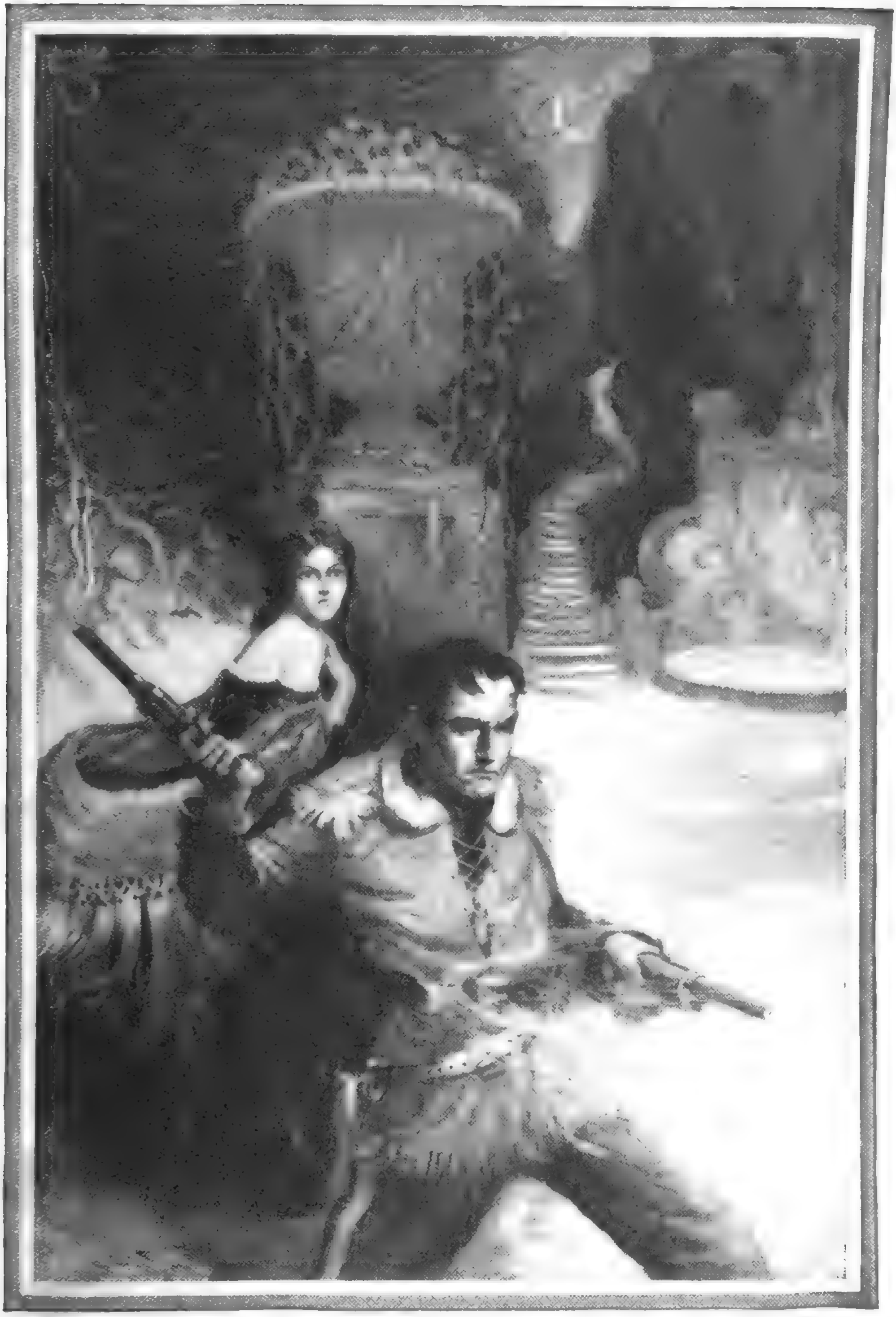
"What course do you think we'd better follow?"

Simon wagged his head and smiled his bitter smile; and he leaned nearer to her, across the table.

"The first person Kildare spoke to after entering here to-night," said he, "was my nephew."

"Well?" said Theresa, and she waited.

"I don't think," went on old Simon,



"She's mine!" said Kildare. "And I'll give her up to no one. I said I would come for her, and here I am."

"any man was ever before cursed with a nephew quite like mine. A headstrong young man, full of impulses, rash, suspicious, and with the will to carry his ideas to any end that he thinks fit. He came blundering into the room that day when I'd taken the Austrian's note from his sister, and when I had hinted at certain possibilities necessary to carry out the plan I had in mind, what a rage he flew into! He fairly towered. He demanded to be told who had wronged her; for, do you see, nothing would answer but the man's life." Old Simon chuckled mirthlessly, and then went on. "And this nephew of mine was the first person Kildare spoke to on entering here to-night." The skinny old hand went up in an exultant gesture. "Almost the first thing the Irishman asked was a question about my niece. And"—here the voice rose with the hand—"almost the first thought in my nephew's mind was—suspicion!"

"Of whom?" asked Theresa Reuchard.

"Of Kildare."

The woman regarded the old man fixedly; she saw his thought forming, but did not quite grasp its outlines.

"But," proceeded Simon Prentiss, "in the state of mind he was in, suspicion leaps up at the remotest hint. He knew that, and for the time, the matter passed. But the sudden flare kept at the back of his thoughts; and when, a little later, he saw Kildare again the man's arms were about Annetta, his kiss was upon her lips; and at that instant suspicion leaped to surmise and then to conviction. As he stood there watching them, I saw the fury in his face; he believed Kildare to be the man he sought."

Still the fixed look was in the eyes of Theresa Reuchard; but the thought in old Simon's mind was plainer to her now; and she said:

"Well; and what now?"

"Plainly," said Simon Prentiss, "I have no patience with your stolid man-killers like Duroc; they lack the fire and spirit of accomplished workmen. In the matter of this mad Irishman I would suggest that a more certain agent is at our hand—more certain because revenge is burning in his mind; one touch more—just one—and he is ablaze and eager to do for us the work we desire."

There was a silence; then the Frenchwoman said, her head nodding appreciatively:

"It would, I know, be good judgment to keep Duroc in the background, and not have him attract too much attention just now; for we'll need his services in other matters later on. If you think we could manage your nephew in this matter, Señor Prentiss, suppose we speak to him. But we must do so at once, for there is not much time."

Old Simon instantly arose.

"I know where to put my hands on him instantly," he said.

"Wait!" He paused and looked at her. "It would be best," she said, "if you do not appear in this. The feeling between you is not good, and he'd be apt to distrust anything you said. Suppose"—she looked at him in the manner of one whose mind is made up—"suppose you have an attendant speak to him—with a message from me."

"Excellent!" said Simon. "That is quite as it should be." He started toward the door. "In a few minutes," he said, "the young hothead will be here. Play him shrewdly and he is yours."

A LITTLE later when Stuart Prentiss entered the room off the salon, he found the Frenchwoman seated in a corner of a silken sofa; she gestured with one white, jeweled hand toward a chair quite near her, and he sat down, brows drawn, and a look of no great favor in his eyes.

"I suppose," she said, "you are somewhat surprised that I should send for you in this way, and are wondering what business I can have with you that is so urgent?"

"You are a friend to Vicente Rayon and to my uncle," said the young American, "and friends of theirs seldom have any dealings with me." He looked at her, the frown still between his eyes. "But here I am, and awaiting your pleasure."

"It is true I am a friend to Señor Rayon and to Señor Prentiss," she said. There was a smile upon her red lips and an amused light in her eyes. "And of course, to one of your temperament, that makes me unfriendly to you. But"—here she ceased to smile, and a serious look replaced the amused one in her eyes—"because they are my friends it does not follow that I must share all their opinions—that my mind shall be the same as theirs on every subject. Sometimes, Señor Prentiss, my thoughts are the reverse of theirs, my judgments are entirely different. And it happens"—here she leaned toward him, her dark eyes fixed steadily upon him—"that I differ with your uncle in a most important thing, just now. I differ with him so completely that I feel it my duty to take some action in the matter; and that, señor, is why I have sent for you."

The young man said nothing. He sat back in his chair and waited. And she went on.

"Your uncle is an old man, and the old sometimes distrust the young; there are some among them who can never be brought to understand that youth at some time or other comes to maturity. Your uncle is one of these; and so he has never seen the need of informing you in important matters. Some days ago"—her voice lowered—"for a reason which need not be mentioned, you asked him for the name of a certain man. And he refused to give it."

The young man's face was white; but his voice was steady enough as he said:

"Well?"

"That is why I have sent for you. That is the thing upon which I differ with your uncle. Wrong has been done; you are Annetta's brother, and the name should be told you."

Stuart Prentiss arose to his feet, his eyes burning once more.

"Do you know it?" he said.

"I do," replied Theresa Reuchard. She also arose. Near her was an open window; a stretch of lighted veranda was seen through it, also the dusky grounds beyond it, and the dark loom of the trees; the splash of the fountain could be heard at some distance. A figure moved along the veranda with quick steps; the Frenchwoman caught sight of it, and her breath quickened as she sensed her opportunity. She grasped Stuart Prentiss' arm. "Look!" she said, and she pointed toward the vanishing man.

"Look!"

"Kildare!" said young Prentiss. His hand shook as he lifted it to his mouth as though to stifle an outcry; his hot eyes were filling with fury. The woman was close at shoulder; her voice was in his ear.

"You have had your own thoughts, I know," she said. "I point to this man. Need any words be used?"

"No," he said: then he leaped through the window, and she saw a revolver in his hand as he disappeared among the trees, going in the direction of the fountain.

THERE followed a short pause, filled by the clicking of the roulette wheel in the salon, the buzz of voices, and low laughter. The slow step of promenaders sounded on the veranda, the rustle of skirts came with the faint breath of perfume.

Then a revolver shot sounded, sharp, sullen, with a deadly crispness!

The wheel click-clicked and then stopped; the voices and the laughter died away; the slow steps and the rustling skirts on the veranda ceased. For a space there was silence, then the footsteps began again, and the voices, too; but the feet were hurrying, the voices were high-pitched, excited. There was confusion for a space; the salon was empty, all were on the verandas, or in the paths bordering the trees—expectant, exclaiming—anxious. Then Theresa Reuchard saw some men, attendants at the Casino, bearing a dark object, cloak-covered and lying upon a portion of a trellis. Immediately the throng closed about it.

"What is this?" demanded an old colonel in a Belgian uniform. "What has happened?"

"Señor," said one of the attendants, in a frightened way, "this man has been murdered. He stood by the fountain; he seemed to be awaiting some one. A man rushed out of the darkness and shot him down."

The men in the throng pressed nearer, but the women shrank back. The old colonel said:

"Who was the assassin?"

"We do not know."

"And who is the man who has been killed?"

"Neither do we know that, señor."

Here Simon Prentiss came forward, his stick tapping on the hard path, eagerness in his face.

"I think, colonel, I can tell you that last," said he. "The thing will prove a most distressing one; and it will be an awkward one to explain. This murdered man is an American officer sent by General Sheridan with dispatches for the Emperor. His name is, I think, Kildare."

There were murmurs of amazement, and through this came a sudden grief-burdened cry. It was Annetta Prentiss, and she threw herself upon her knees beside the body.

"Tom!" she cried. "Oh, Tom! They have killed you!"

She hid her face in the rough cloak which covered the slain man; and her body shook with sobs. Old Simon placed one hand upon her shoulder, and the other was lifted in a gesture to those who stood watching.

"She has been frightened," he said. "Pay no heed to what she says." Then to Stahlberg, who had just reached the spot, he added: "She will be herself in a few moments; a sudden shock always turns her frantic." He bent over the kneeling girl with every appearance of comforting and soothing her. "Be still!" he said in a low tone. "Be silent!"

But she raised her head and defied him.

"I will not be still. I loved Tom Kildare, and now he has been murdered!"

Old Simon looked at those all about; he smiled, and shook his head.

"Bear with her," he said. "She is not responsible for her words. Girls are frail things; their balance is easily disturbed." To Annetta, he said: "Forget this mad soldier. You never loved him; and he never gave a thought to you. Here is one who cares greatly for you." He indicated Stahlberg. "Here is one who will give you the shelter of a great name."

The Austrian stepped forward, anxious, pained, his hand outstretched; but the girl shrank from him. And old Simon grasped her by the arm.

"Annetta," he said, "take care! I command you! Here is one who offers you all a girl could desire—love, and an honorable station. The future is before him; but only the grave awaits Tom Kildare."

A STEP sounded in the path, a firm step, and a voice said:

"The grave awaits us all, señor; but mine is not to be filled just yet."

There was dead silence; old Simon stared at the newcomer with dilated eyes; the face of Theresa Reuchard went white.

"Tom!" cried Annetta. She held out her hands toward Kildare; and in a moment his strong arms were about her.

"If this is your man Kildare," said the old Belgian colonel, pointing to the Irishman, "then who is this?" His fingers indicated the still form beneath the cloak.

In an instant the little hawk-nosed French trooper snatched the covering from the dead man.

"Duroc!" cried Theresa Reuchard. Then amidst the outcries of the onlookers at sight of the dead Frenchman, she whispered in old Simon's ear. "He was awaiting Kildare at the fountain. Your nephew shot him in mistake."

Tom Kildare was speaking to Annetta.

"Don't cry, agra," he said. "Don't cry, now. And if God will be good to us you'll never have cause again."

But the game-cocks—the French troopers, the fighting men, whom Theresa Reuchard kept about her, were gathered in a scowling knot. The sight of their dead companion put rage in their minds; and with their hands on ready weapons they glared at the Celt. The bristling little Gaul with the hooked nose spoke.

"Here lies Duroc," he said. "And we do not know the manner of his death. It is shadowy, there by the fountain—a clever shot and—pouf!—your man is down. Who shall tell us if the thing was fairly done?"

Stahlberg stood pulling at his blond mustache, looking at Kildare, with the girl in his arms; and now his slow Gothic nature took fire. A stride or two brought him forward, and his strong hand was upon Kildare's arm.

"Let go," he said, his voice thick with anger. "Let go, or by God I'll——"

But with a fling Kildare threw the Austrian back; and as he did so he caught the glint of steel amidst the group of fighting men. Women screamed and fled; men cried out.

"She's mine!" said Kildare. "And I'll give her up to no one." His big revolver grinned in his grip, and he had put Annetta behind him. "I said I'd come for her"—to old Simon—"and here I am."

A shot sounded; and then amid a wild confusion came the rush of horses. A compact band of mounted men rushed across the Casino grounds, each clad in Confederate gray; scarcely pausing, Kildare and the girl were swept up, and the band, dark of look, armed and menacing, rode away.

THE band of young Confederates, with Annetta and Tom Kildare in their midst, continued at a sharp pace for some time; then Glade spoke to them and they wheeled off into the main road leading back to the city, leaving Glade and the girl and Kildare behind.

A ride of a half hour, off in another direction, brought the three to a small bower-like house, the windows of which were expectantly lighted. This was Glade's home; here were his mother and two sisters, who had followed his fortunes into Mexico after the surrender of Lee; and they received Annetta kindly and with many exclamations.

When the two young men were finally left alone in a lower room, Glade, as he pressed the tobacco into the bowl of his pipe, said:

"Well, so far we've carried it through. But what remains is the most difficult part."

Kildare smoked his pipe with good-humored ease; he sprawled out in his chair with the manner of a man who did not intend that the future should worry him.

"We will not be too anxious," he said. "I've found that too much of a thing like that is bad; it takes from a man's confidence, so it do. And confidence is a thing I need just now more than anything else."

"But," said Glade, "while that is so, still the situation needs thought. We must not forget that we are in Mexico, and that things here are much different from things in the States. There are laws, to be sure; but the person who controls the military, or can gain the ear of the Emperor, is usually the winner of any contest. This man, Vicente Rayon, has influence at Chapultepec which must not be overlooked; and Theresa Reuchard, through old Cortizar, can force things to any conclusion she desires."

"Bad luck to them," said Kildare. "I don't doubt but they are at work, even now, stirring up trouble for us. Perhaps"—he sat upright in the chair—"it'd be best if Annetta and myself took horse at once and away with us for the border."

But Glade held up a protesting hand.

"No," said he; "you'd never make it. The Rio Grande is many days' ride away; they'd overtake you, and what chance would you have in that lonely region to the north where these man-killers would hold the power of life and death over you?"

Kildare settled back in his chair.

"True for you," he said. "They'd shoot me as they would a coyote. I'll stay where I am, and I'll fight it out with them in the sight of every one." He puffed at his pipe for a space, considering the matter from all sides. "Yes, that's the best way, I think. For, do you see, as the man Phil Sheridan sent with a dispatch for the Emperor, the officials here must use me with care; and as for those I'll have to deal with who are not officials"—a grim look showed about his mouth—"let them give heed to themselves, for I've no reason to give them anything but the sharp word and the heavy hand."

But, also, Kildare had another idea; of this he said nothing until the next afternoon when he was alone with Annetta. And what she said in answer sent a thrilling gladness through him.

"The padre is your friend," said the tall trooper; "I feel sure he is. And he will do anything to help you that his office permits. So let us away to him and be married, out of hand. Once you are my wife, we can laugh at them."

They at once communicated their purpose to the Glades; the women of the household were instantly all aflutter; Glade himself approved of the step, readily.

"Nothing could be better," he said. Then he smiled at Annetta, and added to Kildare: "It will give you possession, and as every one knows, possession is nine points of the law."

The horses were gotten out; Kildare helped Annetta to mount; then they rode away at a good pace, eager, glowing, talking of the kind padre, of how cool and dewy and flower-grown the little chapel would be in the early evening. Then there was a sudden clatter of hoofs, a glitter of equipment, and they found themselves in the midst of a troop of Austrian hussars. Kildare reined his horse alongside Annetta's, and looked at the spick-and-span officer in command.

"Well, señor," he said in Spanish, "what is the meaning of this?"

The dapper hussar officer saluted cheerfully.

"You are Señor Kildare?" he said. "And this is Señorita Prentiss?"

"Yes," replied Kildare.

The officer nodded.

"That is good," he said. "Then we need go no further." He gave a sharp command in German; the troop wheeled and stood waiting. "With you, señor," said the officer, "I have nothing to do." He looked at Kildare and shook his head. "My orders concern the señorita, only."

The hand of Annetta was upon Kildare's arm; he felt the appeal of her touch; it thrilled in his blood, and so he scowled at the dapper hussar and said:

"There is nothing that concerns Señorita Prentiss that does not concern me." The officer shrugged his shoulders, and spoke to his men. They pressed closer, and their ready hands were near the carbines hung at their saddles.

"Tom!" said Annetta, frightened. "What shall we do? I must not be separated from you, now! I cannot go back alone; I would be so helpless."

"You must go with them," he said. "I could oppose your uncle's friends, but these are troops sent upon what has apparently been made government business; to resist them would be useless."

"And have you no hope?" She looked at him, terror in her eyes.

"Annetta," he said in English, "I have all the hope in the world. Let you not worry, agra, for there is one great thing in our favor. All these who are your enemies and mine think I am one lone man and powerless here in Mexico. But they have appealed to the government, as you see; and in that they made a mistake. For, mavourneen, am I not one of Phil Sheridan's men? and is not my general awaiting my return?"

SO ANNETTA PRENTISS and Tom Kildare rode in the midst of the hussars to Chapultepec. This hill is about two miles southwest of Mexico City, and on it, so the old chroniclers say, once stood the palace of the Aztec emperor, Montezuma. About the year 1785, a Spanish viceroy built a castle, at once a fine piece of architecture and a notable place of defense. When the Austrian archduke, Maximilian, accepted the crown of Mexico, offered him by the French, he made the castle of Chapultepec his official residence.

The troop of soldiery drew rein in the courtyard and Kildare and the girl were turned over to another officer, who seemed puzzled at the presence of the northerner, but said nothing. It was evening when they were transferred to a stout, short-breathed man in an elaborate uniform of the court, and he led them into a lofty room in which stood a large number of anxious-looking people. Almost at once, from the midst of this throng, they saw Glade making his way toward them, apparently under the guard of a member of the household troop.

"Well," smiled the young Confederate as he shook hands with them, "I see the flurry of the Emperor's troop has not been for nothing."

"Never tell me you've been taken in this matter," said Kildare, with concern.

"It would seem that my part in the affair at the Casino interested them at least mildly; so they scooped me up a little while ago."

"Why, then," said Kildare, "I'm sorry to get you into a mess like this."

"There's not much occasion for fear on my account," said Glade, with a laugh. "I'm not important enough to get a great deal of their attention." Then, in a whisper, he added to Kildare: "The real danger is with Miss Prentiss. I suppose you know that already; but take care."

Kildare frowned and looked about.

"There are a great many anxious faces here," he said, noting the little groups. "What are they waiting for?"

"Because of the years of revolution and turmoil which Mexico has gone through, there are many people who have had public wrong done them. Many of them bring their pleas here hoping to gain the attention of the Emperor. Poor souls! Some of them will wait a weary time, for their matters are beyond the help of any one."

BEYOND the door about which most of the waiting ones clustered, was the audience hall of Maximilian. This was filled with gossiping groups of courtiers, of officers of high rank in the various European services which made up the Mexican army—of beautifully gowned women whose loveliness was of most of the types of the western world.

"Oh, yes!" a young Austrian was saying in the midst of one group. "The girl is outside. I saw her myself. Klingman, of the hussars, brought them both in some time ago."

A veteran Spaniard who wore a huge gray mustache, shook his head forbodingly.

"By 'both' I suppose you mean that the American officer was also taken. That is bad. Klingman would have shown much more shrewdness had he allowed the northerner to go his way."

A murmur went up at this. Some were clearly opposed to the sentiment behind the Spaniard's words; while others, again, favored it.

"That attitude," said a French officer, "holds all the elements of Mexican weakness. The country has permitted itself to become cowed by the idea of the United States. You are all like well broken setters; your instinct is to crouch at the word."

"What you say," spoke a squat, broad-faced man whose features showed a strong strain of Indian blood, "has the appearance of fact, Major Crochard. But it is *only* the appearance. Mexico is not cowed. The time will come when she will speak out boldly. But with the American army facing us across the Rio Grande, we must be politic. I agree with Señor Cordoba; it would have been much better to have permitted the American to escape."

The young Austrian laughed.

"Klingman tells me he had no idea of interfering with the fellow; he could have ridden away and not a soul would have lifted a hand to stop him. Indeed, he was invited to do so. But he insisted; he would not part from the girl. And no doubt he will insist upon an audience with the Emperor."

The group in a few moments had separated into several units. The gray-mustached Spaniard and the half-breed conversed at one side.

"I feared something like this when Cortizar induced the Emperor to interfere," said the Indian. "I tried to speak; but his Majesty has a way of looking at one when he does not wish to hear."

"You do not think he knew, then, that his interference would entangle an Americano?"

"I'm sure he did not. He was led to believe that it was an escapade of a pair of thoughtless lovers, over both of whom he had authority."

"Whatever comes or goes," said the Spaniard, "I hope no trouble comes of it with the American forces. One surge forward of Sheridan's army and the people will take advantage of it, and be in rebellion against us."

The door leading to the Emperor's private apartments now opened and the Archbishop of Mexico City, a Spanish ecclesiastic who wore the titles and importance of his office with polished ease, entered the grand hall. At once he was surrounded by an eager crowd; and he lifted his white, jeweled hands in protest.

"Ladies! Gentlemen! Have patience! Yes, I have just left His Majesty. He has had a laborious day with matters of state and is much fatigued."

"Will he give audience to-night?"

"I am not sure. It depends upon circumstances."

"Is any one with him just now?"

"His counselor, Cortizar, and Colonel Rayon, only."

As the archbishop made his way across the audience hall he left a trail of buzzing gossip behind him.

OLD Simon Prentiss crossed the great room to where Theresa Reuchard was seated, looking strikingly handsome, one hand trifling with a magnificent necklace.

"Our friends work quickly," said Simon, much gratified. "They are now with the Emperor."

Theresa yawned behind her fan.

"I asked Cortizar to so arrange it," she said. "Have you sent for Stahlberg?"

"Yes; he will be here, directly." Old Simon chuckled and rubbed his hands together. "Oh, youth, youth! What a great thing it is!"

"In love," smiled the woman, "years make little difference. Young or old, men are much alike. See!" She held up the necklace. "This is from a man who is very deeply in love."

"Wonderful!" said Simon. "From Cortizar?"

"Yes."

There was a spirit of malice in old Simon which he sometimes could not control; he smiled disagreeably.

"I might have known that it was not

from Rayon," said he, "for you said it was from a man in——"

He halted abruptly, realizing what he was upon the verge of doing. But for all the quick stop, the woman caught his meaning—and the smile left her face. With narrowed eyes she gazed at the old man; there was now a hard, inquiring look in them, and the red mouth was set in a way that told of danger.

"Yes," she said, softly, after a few moments, "you were saying of Rayon——"

In his wicked old heart Simon Prentiss cursed his tendency to gloat over the weak and ugly places which he turned up in his intercourse with others; so with his skinny hands writhing together and with an ingratiating smile, he tried to quiet her suspicions.

"Rayon is a man of parts," he said, "he has fire, personality and the qualities that command attention. He is of the sort that do not need to give jewels to prove their love, or to make the women love them."

The woman's eyes were still narrowed; but the hard inquiry had given place to some degree of eagerness.

"And do you think—" she began; but her question remained unfinished, for at that moment there came a sudden commotion, and opening and closing of doors; a wave of expectation swept through the room as Tom Kildare, bold-eyed, smiling and ready of manner appeared in the audience hall with Annetta Prentiss at his side.

A FEW moments later Glade was also admitted to the audience chamber, and with him was an elderly man in the uniform of a Confederate cavalry officer, and wearing the insignia of a general. Glade at once introduced Kildare, and General Magruder shook hands with him heartily.

"I've heard a good deal of you, young man, since you got into Mexico," said he, laughing, and pulling at his huge white mustache, "and I'm glad to see you."

"Why, then," smiled Kildare, "how time gives a different twist to things! There's nothing like it to change one's point of view. Only a year ago while the war was still on I'd as soon have seen the divil himself as you; and now you are as welcome as the first bluebird in spring."

The general laughed. "Right," said he. "A little time will do wonders. I've just begun to realize it myself. I now see that Lee had the better understanding of the situation when he surrendered. I thought it the more soldierly thing to do to cross the Rio Grande with my men and continue to defy the Federal authorities."

"But now you find yourself not at all in agreement with these plotting blackguards," said Kildare, nodding his head. "I understand that. Faith, there is not one of them who is a friend to anybody but himself."

"Where their plots concern Mexico alone," said General Magruder, "I have no fault to find with them. Let them adjust matters below the Texas line to please themselves. But the core of their scheming is deeper than that; if they were permitted to carry out their intentions the Southwest and far West would be one great battle-ground for the next twenty years."

Annetta sat in a sheltered corner where the lights were rather dim; and Kildare stood talking with the two Confederates some distance away. And suddenly the girl was startled by a voice close beside her.

"Señorita," it said softly. She looked up, frightened, and saw Rayon. "I ask your pardon," he said.

"For what?" she asked, putting down the fear she felt for him, and assuming a manner of ice. "For the part you have taken in the persecution of me?"

He bent over her.

"Believe me," said he, "any part that I've had in what has been done was undertaken with reluctance." He saw the look of disbelief in her eyes, and went on, an appeal in his voice. "There is nothing I desire more than your good will."

"If that is so," said the girl, "you have selected a strange way of gaining it."

"What has happened has put me in a bad light, I know. I have often tried to get a word with you, anxious to set myself right in your eyes. But you've kept me at a distance."

The girl regarded him, coldly; it was surprising to her how courage came with effort. She now could not only face him, but show her resentment.

"If I have held you so," she asked, "can you wonder at it? Have not you and your friends given me cause?"

"I have been entangled in a net of circumstances from the very first. I could not help myself. A thousand things conspired to make me seem your enemy, where the reverse was the case. No one desires your welfare more than I." He bent so close that she fancied she could feel his breath. "I love you!" he said.

She gazed at him, amazed.

"You love me," she said, her voice lifting.

"Hush!" he said, and she saw his eyes go toward where Theresa Reuchard was sitting, not far away.

The girl looked at him steadily; there was no fear in her face now, only contempt.

"I think I understand you," she said. "You play false even with those who aid you."

"Why will you look upon the worst side of me?" said the man. "I will play fair with you. You are different. She is a means to an end. But I *want* you."

Annetta gave a little gesture of repulsion.

"Will you please leave me?" she said.

"One moment." He looked down at her, his dark eyes alight. "You are only a girl and you think yourself in love with this northern soldier. A little delay will tell you that you are deceiving yourself. He is only an adventurer and not worthy of you. The power I am seeking to gain will surely come to me. In six months' time I will have the army of the empire in my hands, and then——"

She arose, but he followed her for a step or two.

"You will change your mind, I tell you. You will surely see what is best for you before this night is over. And if you do"—eagerly—"send me your glove. I shall know what that means, and will come to you at once."

He gazed after the slim, graceful figure of the girl as she left him; and as he stood there, a chamberlain entered from the royal apartments announcing:

"His Majesty, the Emperor!"

And with that, Maximilian, ruler of the Europe-created empire of Mexico, and glittering in the uniform of a general, came into the hall of audience.

AT THE entrance of the Emperor all in the room arose and bowed; the Austrian inclined his head gravely, and stood listening to those who attended him. Maximilian was a tall young man, with a face that was more than usually thoughtful and a manner that was distinguished and noble. He was then in his thirty-third year, and had reached about the end of his first twelve months on the Mexican throne.

"A fine, upstanding fellow, enough," commented Tom Kildare, to Annetta, after he had studied the monarch for a few moments. "And, I take it, a man who would do what he thought to be right in every instance."

The Confederate general, Magruder, nodded.

"You are right," said he. "I never met a more honest man. But look at him closely. His face is the saddest, I think, I ever saw. One year as sovereign of this turbulent people, with mercenary soldiers all about him and politicians plotting for personal preferment, has amazed and disconcerted him. By nature he is more of the student than the statesman; he lacks the iron grip of the ruler who holds a conquered throne."

"He is a stranger prince," said Glade, "but it is his desire to rule with wisdom; he sees the poverty and brutish condition of the people, and is burning to improve it. And yet"—looking at those about the Emperor—"I don't see one in all his train whose desire is the same as his own."

"But, to come back to the question of the moment," said Glade, "the fact that the Emperor is all right at heart is a hopeful sign for Miss Prentiss, is it not, general?"

"Well, yes, it should be. But then, remember, very honest men are always more or less at the mercy of whatever rogues they have about them. His lack of suspicion makes him their prey."

"Faith, then, general, agra, that's where you come in," said Kildare. "You are a friend to the Emperor; away with you, now, and whisper the truth into his ear."

Annetta's white hand was upon the general's sleeve.

"Oh, please!" she said. "Do what you can. It is not right that the single judgment or word of any man should decide a girl's happiness or unhappiness. But the Emperor's judgment and word to-day will decide mine."

"My dear child," said the old Southern soldier, "you may depend upon me to do all I can, and at once."

General Magruder approached the Emperor, who received him with outheld hand and a word of welcome.

"He's glad to see him, faith," said Kildare to Annetta. "There's no doubt about that."

But Cortizar, a gray, squat old man, with a decided strain of Indian blood, was at the Emperor's side, and Glade called Kildare's attention to him.

"There is the man whose power the general will have to fight against. He has great influence with the Emperor, and this influence Theresa Reuchard can command at any time."

General Magruder had spoken only a few words to Maximilian when Cortizar said:

"Will your Majesty pardon my insistence?" As the sad face of the Emperor turned toward him, he went on: "All the persons interested in this matter of Señor Prentiss are here, your Majesty, and awaiting your pleasure."

The Emperor smiled wearily.

"Oh, yes, yes!" Then he turned to Magruder with a wan smile. "You see, general," he said, "in Mexico I am indeed the father of my people. They call upon me to settle even their love affairs."

"If that is the case," said Magruder, "it shows that you have, indeed, won your way to their hearts."

MAXIMILIAN'S face lighted at this, and he looked eagerly at Cortizar. That statesman at once, with much adroitness, turned the monarch's evident elation to his own account.

"What General Magruder says, is true, sire," said he, cunningly, "and it is your readiness to do what you can that will win a way for you that could not be won by any other means."

"You are right, Cortizar!" Maximilian's face was full of sudden enthusiasm. "You are very right."

And now General Magruder spoke.

"This matter, so it happens, is of interest to me. Some of the persons concerned are my friends."

The Emperor looked at him, surprised; and Cortizar spoke:

"The young man who was to have been the girl's husband, your Majesty, is, if you will recall the facts, young Stahlberg. A gentleman deserving of Mexico's favor."

"That is true!" said the Emperor, the nature of Stahlberg's mission to Mexico in his mind. "He is one whose talents make me very well disposed toward him."

But General Magruder was a man of ready, alert mind; he, like Kildare, had recognized the Irishman's trump card and now played it.

"There can be no doubt as to the young man's good qualities," said the general. "And that he was the suitor favored by the girl's uncle there is no doubt. But the one accepted by the girl herself is the American officer who lately brought your Majesty the dispatches from the Yankee general, Sheridan."

Maximilian's training in the Austrian court had taught him to conceal his emotions. But, in spite of this, he now looked startled.

"An American—one of Sheridan's men!" He looked at Cortizar, quick displeasure in his usually mild eyes. "Why have I not been told of this before?"

Cortizar, whose chief business in life was to take advantage of the unpreparedness in others, was never unprepared himself.

"Your Majesty," said he, smoothly, "it is always my first desire not to worry you by a knowledge of the small intrigues of insignificant people who are striving to gain your attention."

"We thank you for that, Cortizar," said the Emperor. "But our relations with the government at Washington are most delicate, and small things are sometimes sufficient to disturb a political balance. And once we interfere"—he gestured his dissatisfaction—"there is now no telling what this matter of Señorita Prentiss may lead to."

Cortizar moved very close to the monarch's side.

"But, sire," he whispered, "we must not forget Stahlberg. His good will is of great consequence to your Mexico. And Stahlberg wants this girl for his wife."

Maximilian frowned. He resented a situation which placed him between two evils and forced him to risk a choice. He knew that the judgment of Stahlberg would eventually make or mar his empire's chances of support by the armies of his brother, Franz Josef; and so he desired to do nothing that would antagonize that young man. And yet, to interfere with anything in which, even though distantly, so intimate a peril as Sheridan was concerned, chilled him. So he said, impatiently:

"Very well, then. Where is this girl who has caused such a clash of interests and a drawing of weapons? Have her brought here, at once."

A murmur ran the length of the great room; a stir followed it; and Annetta was led forward by her uncle, her eyes downcast, her face white. Kildare came immediately behind her, and Stahlberg, eager and ardent enough, approached with Rayon at his side.

"This, sire," said Cortizar, presenting Annetta to the Emperor, "is Señorita Prentiss, ward to this your subject by declaration, Simon Prentiss."

MAXIMILIAN looked at the girl; her beauty and charm at once appealed to him; the frown vanished from his face, and he said, kindly:

"So this is the girl! And just as I expected—a very pretty one." His eyes left her face and went about. "And the young man?" The tall Austrian stepped eagerly forward. "Ah, yes, Stahlberg, to be sure."

The quick regard with which he greeted the young man caused a murmur to run about among the little group of conspirators.

"Has the matter reached me aright, Señor Stahlberg?" asked the Emperor. "Do you desire to make this girl your wife?"

"I do, your Majesty," replied the Austrian, eagerly.

The brows of the ruler were lifted slightly as he turned to Annetta.

"Do you hear, señorita? Is it possible that you look higher than this?"

"Your Majesty—" began Annetta. But the Emperor impatiently, but not unkindly, interrupted.

"Are you aware of the honor that is being offered you? There is no finer name in Europe than his—no family of greater estate, or more noble. And I am sure there is no man whom the Mexican empire desires to favor more."

There was a general movement; again the subdued murmur went up.

"I thank your Majesty," said Stahlberg, with a low bow to the Emperor; the latter had turned to Annetta and seemed upon the verge of a definite pronouncement when General Magruder leaned forward and whispered a few words in his ear. At once the shadow fell again upon Maximilian's countenance.

"To be sure," said he, and his manner was a trifle flurried. "To be sure." He looked about. "We have been reminded," he said, "that there is still another claimant for this young lady's hand. If he is present, let him stand out."

In a moment Tom Kildare stood before the Emperor and saluted with military definiteness.

"Ah, yes, a northerner!" The Emperor regarded the tall figure with its suggestion of swift power, the resolute face and the candid well-opened eyes. "You are in Mexico, lieutenant, for the purpose of——"

Once more Kildare saluted.

"I am awaiting any answer your Majesty's government decides to make to the communication of General Sheridan."

"We were not aware that this officer awaited a reply," said the Emperor to Cortizar, displeasure upon his face.

"Nor was I, sire," said the counselor, readily.

Maximilian turned to Kildare once more.

"You may carry this response to your general," said he. "In the first place we consider the presence of his army upon our border a menace to our peace."

"Pardon!" Kildare looked the Emperor steadily in the face. "Texas has been in a state of war. The army of Sheridan is thought by the government at Washington to be necessary to completely restore that section to the Union."

"Why then does he cling to the Rio Grande?" demanded the Emperor, sharply. A murmur went up from the courtiers and officials within earshot. "Why does he place Texas behind him and face Mexico?"

That the monarch was fully acquainted with each step in the development which brought Sheridan and his blue legions to the border, Kildare well knew. He also knew that it was the customary attitude of a diplomat or negotiator to affect little or no knowledge of a point in question and require detailed explanations of everything in the hope of finding something over which to quibble. Quick of wit and resourceful as he always showed himself to be in a pinch, Kildare at once adopted the best means of defense against this procedure.

"There is a constant crossing and recrossing of the Rio Grande by bands variously connected," stated he. "And the general finds it necessary to cling close to the river to prevent this."

"The crossing of Confederate troops into Mexico was frowned upon by this government some time since," declared Cortizar.

"It is not altogether the Confederates of whom General Sheridan complains," spoke Kildare, his gaze still upon Maximilian. "There are other bands, notably those from this side of the border. It has been said that they are followers of Juarez; at any rate they show a keen knowledge, the blackguards, of the places where arms and ammunition are to be had; for each time they cross they make away with a deal of it."

Again the murmur went up from the circle of courtiers; Maximilian frowned as Cortizar spoke to him in low tones.

"In other words," said the Emperor, after a few moments, "you mean that your commander is arming my rebellious subjects?"

"Why, then, General Sheridan would not care to do anything like that. Faith, your Majesty, I know it would grieve him to the heart. But the delay of your Majesty's government to do certain things requested of it, keeps the American Army upon the border; and I'm afraid"—significantly—"as long as it is there, Juarez, fox that he is, will find equipment of war to make off with when no one is looking."

"Your Majesty!" cried Cortizar. "This is infamous!"

"I have heard my general use that very word," said Kildare, calmly. "But, faith, it was no use! The thing still goes on."

"Your friend is able to take care of himself," amusedly whispered Magruder to Glade.

"So I perceive," returned the lieutenant, a gleam of appreciation in his eyes.

The face of Maximilian was heavy with gloom; what he had just heard was a thing he had long suspected. The scattered bands of wild horsemen who made up the following of the rebel chief, Juarez, were combining; secretly the United States was providing them with arms; and in a little while they would be once more harrying the towns and the outposts.

"You will make instant and formal complaint to Washington," he said to Cortizar.

"As the American State Department continues to refuse to recognize your Majesty's government," said the counselor, "any representation your Majesty desires to make must be made to General Sheridan."

With the gloomy look growing deeper in his face, the Emperor stood for a moment in thought. Then he said to Kildare:

"We will prepare a complaint which we will ask you to carry. It will not be in writing, but by word of mouth. Your commander will not think this strange"—rather bitterly; "you already seem very well acquainted with his affairs, and are no doubt his confidant and friend."

"All Sheridan's soldiers are his friends," said Kildare. "He says to them: 'Stick to me, boys, and I'll stick to you; and if an injustice is done you by any one, anywhere, I'll see to it, faith, no matter how far I have to go to do it.'"

Maximilian looked searchingly into the face of the tall trooper and there read the remainder of the warning. With a gesture he was turning away, when Cortizar made an effort to stay him.

"Your Majesty," said the counselor, hastily, "what of the matter of Señorita Prentiss?"

"I think," said the Emperor, annoyed, "matters such as that should be settled between the persons concerned. I cannot be vexed with such things, Cortizar. In the future see to it that they are not brought to my attention."

AS MAXIMILIAN was about to turn away he found Theresa Reuchard at his side.

"Your Majesty!" she said.

The Emperor paused. He was a man, as his writings, afterward published, proved, of rigid religious principles and almost austere life. Nevertheless, he was a European prince and had spent his youth in the courts of kings and emperors, and so had come to regard certain social complexities in the light of commonplaces. He knew Theresa was the mistress of Cortizar, and as such attached to the fringe of his court; but he also knew she was a clever woman, and had benefited by her sagacity more than once.

"As you have concluded, sire," said

Theresa Reuchard, a smile upon her beautiful face, and her manner entirely unruffled by the sudden turn of affairs, "the matter of Señorita Prentiss is *not* one of state. It is a matter of the heart. And in such matters"—smilingly—"women are very expert. It is not, as you say, for you to decide such things, so I beg of your Majesty to leave it to me."

Maximilian was a weak man; if proof of this were needed, the fact that he had permitted the wily French emperor to persuade him into accepting the unstable Mexican throne would alone prove the contention. He detested making definite decisions in debated matters; he shrank from offending those who had been, or might be, useful to him. Cortizar had been most useful, and the Emperor disliked refusing him his interests; and he eagerly grasped the suggestion of the Frenchwoman as a light and pleasant method of wiping out possible ill-will. So now he turned to the contending parties with a quick smile.

"Do you hear?" he said. "What do you say to this? The judgment of a woman should be excellent in such a matter."

An instant before the seasoned Cortizar had counted himself defeated, and had accepted with a bow; now he saw a sudden, unlooked-for chance of victory extended to him, and he bowed in the selfsame way.

"Nothing could be better, sire," said he. "In affairs of this sort women have a peculiar knowledge. And in this particular case such knowledge would be invaluable."

Maximilian did not wait for the word of the others, but turned to the Frenchwoman, greatly pleased: to him, who always took the way that promised the easiest going, the matter was already settled.

"Very well," he said. "It shall be as you desire; though, of course the Emperor cannot surrender a possible last word. But let us have your judgment soon, for this gentleman"—with a stiff nod toward Kildare—"starts almost immediately for the Texas border."

With that the doors leading into the room where the petitioners awaited the Emperor, rolled back and Maximilian, followed by his court, went out. Annetta grasped Kildare's arm; her eyes were wide with fright.

"Don't mind any of them, agra," he said in a low tone. "Sure, 'tis nothing at all. The Emperor is like putty; any one that gets his ear can form him to their purpose. Sit you here, mavourneen." He led her to a sofa. "I'll have a few words with him."

He was crossing toward the door leading to the petitioners' hall; and as he passed Theresa Reuchard, she looked at him, her black eyes flashing triumphantly.

"You were clever," she said, in a low tone. "And I think you frightened him with your threats. Yes, you were clever." She nodded her head, piled high with shining black hair. "But it will take more than that to win your cause, Señor Kildare."

Kildare looked at her good-humoredly.

"The cards are not all in," he said; "the hands are not valued; until they are and have told their story, don't count me beaten. The Irish, as a nation, have the divil's own luck; but sometimes—listen to this, now—sometimes you'll find one among them that the very stars seem to fight for."

KILDARE had gone out into the hall of petitioners with Glade and Magruder; at a swift word from Theresa, Cortizar, Rayon and old Simon had hastened after them. And then Theresa approached Annetta where she sat troubled and waiting; the Frenchwoman stood looking down at the girl, a gleam of mockery in her eyes.

"You heard what his Majesty said?" she asked.

"Yes," replied the American girl. And then she added with meaning, "And I heard what you said, also."

The Frenchwoman smiled; she waved her feathered fan gently.

"The situation is rather unusual," she said. "I seem to have the disposal of you."

"At least," said Annetta, "you have tried to arrange it so."

"Oh, come now!" said Theresa Reuchard. "Don't assume that tone and manner. One would think you had something to resent, when really the contrary is true. I have nothing but the very kindest thoughts of you; and I am going to see to it that you are established in a way that thousands of women would envy."

The girl was silent; Theresa, still waving the fan, smiled wisely.

"I know what you are thinking," she said. "You fancy that as the wife of young Stahlberg you would be miserable. But that is nonsense. If you had not met Tom Kildare, you would have married the Austrian readily enough."

"But," said Annetta, "I *have* met Tom Kildare. And I love him. He has been gentle and kind to me, and I will be the wife of no man but him."

"CANDIDLY," said Theresa Reuchard, "you are a little fool. Put such thoughts out of your mind. No woman should permit love to rule her; it should be a servant and not the master."

Annetta looked up at her; there was a steady look in the girl's eyes that the Frenchwoman had not noticed before; and about the corners of her mouth there was a little smile.

"It is strange to hear *you* say that," said the girl.

Theresa caught the stress put upon that single word, and her eyes narrowed.

"Why do you say that?" she asked.

The amusement was now not only about the girl's lips; it was in her eyes as well. And more than that: there was a sudden, deeper thing, also there, a swift spark of intuition, a resolution, a mental grasping of a weapon newly seen, and, as soon as it was grasped, an impulse to attack.

"Oh, perhaps because you have always seemed greatly experienced. And having experienced"—here the girl looked into the Frenchwoman's beautiful face with some of its former mockery in her own—"you must know a woman's love for a man makes a slave of her. How often has it happened"—Annetta nodded with an air of significant wisdom—"that a man is cold and forgetful, even when a woman does her utmost to hold him to her? How often does it happen that her whole ambition is to forward his interests, and yet not once does she see a thought of thanks warming in his eyes."

Theresa Reuchard studied the girl's face for a moment and then turned away. There was a swift something in her breast, a sudden rush of something like hate. Rayon was a man of that kind. She held the thought bitterly to her heart and looked back across all the years she had known him. He had always been so. He had never returned in even the slightest degree what she had given him. He was cold; no thought of her was ever in his mind. And people saw this. She turned toward Annetta; there was a smile on the girl's lips, and at sight of it the woman clenched her hands; she fought back the fury that filled her.

"You are smiling, señorita," she said.

"Please forgive me," said the girl. The smile was full of mischief; but a clear observer would have noted that her eyes were singularly intent. She arose and stood before Theresa. "I cannot go on in this way. It is wicked to so deceive any one."

The Frenchwoman looked at her with cold, narrowed eyes.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

Annetta stood leaning against a huge casement; her arm was thrown out, her hand was holding lightly to a hanging drapery; she looked at the other woman with a measured, mocking glance; and there was that in her manner which Theresa had never seen before.

"I have deceived you," she said, "in that I have made you think it made a difference to me which of these two men was chosen for me." Theresa's eyes were filled with astonishment; and the girl went on: "Neither the Austrian, nor the Irishman really interest me. They have never done so. My happiness does not rest with either of them—there is some one else——"

"Some one else!" Theresa, as the girl paused, looked at her incredulously. "Another man! So!" The woman laughed. "So this is the convent-bred dove! This is the frightened little thing whom the lightest breath would set a-fluttering!"

"Are you surprised at that?" asked the girl. "You set the fashion in such things; I am only following you. But later"—the smile in her eyes deepened—"perhaps I may not be content to follow."

Theresa laughed. "So you have an ambition to displace me?" she said. "It might be that you even think of taking my lovers from me. Who knows? Even Cortizar may not escape you."

The girl pursed up her lips.

"Cortizar is old," she said. "Is there not some one whom you value still more? Vicente Rayon, for example?"

Theresa Reuchard's eyes blazed; she lifted her head like a startled leopardess.

"A child like you!" she said. "It is absurd!"

But Annetta smiled; her teeth showed white between her parted lips as she said: "Do you doubt I could take him from you?" She looked at the beautiful, startled woman before her with level eyes. "Do you want proof? If you do, nothing is easier." She studied Theresa a moment, and then took a sudden step toward her, and said in a lowered voice: "Shall I show you that he does not belong to you? Shall I show you that he has *never* belonged to you?"

With reared head and defiant eyes Theresa Reuchard stood silent; then she said:

"Vicente Rayon does belong to me. I will always believe that until my own eyes show me it is not true."

"Very well." Annetta stood softly smoothing one of the long gloves which she wore. "Will you do what I ask?" she said to Theresa Reuchard after a pause. "To have the matter quickly tested, will you do as I say?"

"Yes," replied Theresa, readily.

"Then," said Annetta, "leave me, now. In a little while I will send for you. A page will bring you my glove; that will be a sign that you are to follow him without delay. Does this satisfy you?"

Theresa Reuchard inclined her head, but she said no word. She turned and left the audience chamber; and as the doors closed after her, Annetta, now white and weak, the courage which had enabled her to keep up the pretense suddenly gone, sank down upon a divan, her hand held tightly over her straining heart.

FORTUNATELY, at this moment, the young Confederate lieutenant, Glade, entered the room; in an instant Annetta's courage returned and she signaled to him.

"What is it?" asked Glade as he reached her side, and looked at her, anxiously. "You are white and ill."

"Sit here beside me," she said. "I must speak to some one, and I am glad it is you."

Then, as the young man sat down, she told him of the plan she had formulated; startled and wondering, Glade listened, and when she had ceased speaking, he said:

"There must be some way of checking these people and spoiling their intentions; but this way which you have chosen is an almost impossible one. You will never have the strength to carry it through."

"I will," said Annetta. "I have begun, and I will carry it through to the end."

Glade was silent a moment, studying her; then he said:

"Very well; if you are determined, have your way. But is there nothing in which I can aid you?"

"Only this: say nothing to any one; send a page to me; then remain somewhere near at hand, but out of sight. Knowing that you are within call will help me to go on."

A few moments after Glade left the hall of audience a page entered and approached Annetta; he was a lad with quick, intelligent eyes, who understood her wants immediately. He led her to a small alcoved place, the door of which was hung with heavy draperies. Annetta looked about, satisfied; and as she drew off her gloves she studied the boy.

"You are to do something for me that is very important," she said. "And it is something in which you must not fail."

"No, señorita," said the page.

She handed him one of the gloves.

"Give this to Colonel Rayon," she said, "and whisper to him where I am."

"Yes, señorita."

"After that"—giving him the second glove—"carry this to Theresa Reuchard. Give it to her and bring her to this doorway."

"Yes, señorita," said the boy, confidently; and he went alertly away.

Annetta waited, frightened, but calling resolvedly upon her courage; then the draperies at the door rustled, and Rayon entered, eagerly.

"Annetta!" he said. For an instant she felt she must swoon; her eyes were closed, she heard his steps coming toward her. "I came at once—the moment I received the glove."

Annetta opened her eyes; she crushed down the loathing she felt for him; she even smiled and held out both hands. He grasped them tightly; his dark eyes were burning.

"Words could not tell your thought like that," he said. He stood looking down at her. "Awhile ago you almost made me believe what you said. I had begun to think there was no hope for me!"

She laughed; there was a stain of color in her cheeks; her eyes sparkled.

"No hope for *you!*" she said.

He looked at her, eagerly.

"It shows how little a man understands a woman," he said. "He never has and never will quite understand her. You loved me, and yet you denied me. But now——"

His arms went around her; his lips approached her own. Then her courage left her; in sudden horror she fought herself free; panting, wild-eyed, she stood staring at him.

"Don't touch me!" she gasped. "Don't touch me!"

The man's face wore an ugly look of defeat.

"Will you explain?" he said. "I think I understand this attitude even less than the other."

Through the confusion of fear Annetta saw the danger which this weakness had brought upon her plans; at the same moment she saw a stirring at the draperies of the door, and her breath caught, painfully. It was Theresa Reuchard! She had received the glove! She was on the other side of the hangings; she was listening! With a supreme effort Annetta stifled the fear which held her; she even smiled waveringly.

"I was a little frightened," she said.

He looked at her sullenly.

"You sent for me," he said. "And yet, now that I am here——"

She held up her hand, and he stopped.

"Do you not see?" she said, and her eyes were fixed on his. "Do you not see why I draw away from you? How can a woman accept a man's words of love and his kisses when she feels sure that he belongs to another?"

"Another!" A sudden light came into his face—an eager light that held both understanding and triumph. "Do you mean Theresa Reuchard?"

"Yes."

"You are jealous." His laugh filled the alcoved space. "Admit it. You are jealous of Theresa!"

"Haven't I cause?" The girl saw a hand—the beautiful, white hand of Theresa Reuchard—holding tightly to a fold of the drapery at the doorway; the rigid grip told its own story; and Annetta went on, a sense of victory growing in her. "Haven't I seen you two together, often and often? It is commonly said—by every one—that you love her."

"I do not love her," said Rayon, passionately. "I have never loved her." He held out his hands, advancing toward Annetta. "There has never been any one but you."

But she held him off.

"Men are so hard to believe," she said. She studied him for a moment. "Will you make me a promise?" she said. "Will you agree to give this woman up—for good and all?"

"I will," he said.

"Upon your honor?"

"Upon my honor as a soldier." Then he went swiftly toward her. "Is that not enough, Annetta?" He stood looking down at her. "Shall I not be paid for all the long weeks I have loved you at a distance? Shall not all your former coldness be made up to me a hundred-fold? Come now, what is my reward to be?"

She put one hand against his breast and held him away. There was a swaying of the draperies at the door, and soft footfalls beyond them; the girl smiled up at Rayon, and she said:

"Your reward, señor? No, I do not know what it is to be." She nodded her head; there was a serene look now in her eyes. "But be patient, for I am sure it will be everything that you deserve."

THE inspiration that had come to the mind of Annetta Prentiss to save herself by showing Vicente Rayon's treachery to Theresa Reuchard, was sharply cut and well enough in itself; but it had one weakness; it did not allow for the modifications of chance in its working. And, so, when the Frenchwoman, with fury in her breast, turned from the draperies through which she had heard the confession of the Mexican, the first person she saw was Tom Kildare, entering the great empty hall of audience with hasty step and looking about, apparently for Annetta. Instantly Theresa paused; her quick mind flashed up with the possibilities of his appearance at that moment. He saw her, and the expression of rage still in her face caused him to look at her curiously.

"Ah, well," he said, with a smile, "it's been a great day, entirely, and a power of things have happened in it. But whatever it is that's come upon you now has shaken you badly, so it has."

She did not reply; and his eyes again traveled about the great room. She noted the disappointment in them when he did not see Annetta, and her mind closed about the fact, eagerly. Annetta! The hands of Theresa Reuchard clenched, her eyes were full of hate. In the hot rage of the moment there was no revenge too poignant to wreak upon Vicente Rayon; but the girl had taken him from her! She too, must suffer.

"You are looking for some one, señor?" said Theresa, in a low voice.

"Yes," replied Kildare.

"It is, perhaps, Señorita Prentiss," she suggested, still in the low voice.

"Right!" said the Celt. "You've guessed it the first time, agra."

She laughed. Her face was gray, and the laugh had no mirth in it; she reached out and her hand closed on his arm. As he looked at her the lines about his mouth tightened; for that mystic sense which warns Irish or Scottish Celt of danger to come, was fluttering its signals in his mind.

"She is not here," said Theresa Reuchard, "though she is not far away." She looked at him intently for a moment; then she spoke again. "What would you say if I told you the girl you love so much was making a fool of you?"

He smiled at her.

"I would say nothing," he replied.

"What would you say"—her grip upon his arm growing tighter—"if I should tell you she cared nothing at all for you, but cared greatly for some one—a man who is your enemy—Vicente Rayon?"

"There are some things," said Kildare, "that are so absurd that we can't reply to them for laughing at them."

But the woman persisted; she was not to be shaken off.

"What would you say if I told you that only a moment ago I saw her with Rayon, that his arms were about her——"

He stopped her with a gesture.

"In talking like this you are doing yourself no credit," he said. "You have always had a fine touch for divilment; but this is crude enough, so it is."

She looked at him with knowing eyes; and there was a laugh about her lips.

"You can't fool me," she said. "I know your type, well. You affect to laugh at what I have to say; but, for all that, there is fear in your heart that my words may be true." She looked about. Near at hand was a long window opening upon a balcony; with a gleam in her dark eyes she said: "Have you the courage to stand quietly there"—she pointed to the balcony—"to stand quietly for a few moments, avoid being seen, and listen, and nothing more?"

He stood silent a moment, studying her.

"I believe I understand you," he said; "though I am not sure. But if you think you can shake my faith in this girl in even the smallest way, you are wasting your time, agra."

"Will you stand there," she said, still pointing to the balcony, "and watch?"

"I will," he replied.

He quietly moved toward the long window; but again her grip was upon his arm.

"For all your show of strength," she said, "you are weak as all men are weak who care greatly for a woman. But"—there was the breath of a tigress in the whispered words—"if your love for this girl has left any spirit in you, this"—she touched the heavy revolver at his side—"will speak to the man who has taken her from you."

He put her aside with one hand.

"I need no suggestions," he said. "The words spoken by a Colt can seldom be taken back; and so, do you see, this one never speaks until my own judgment tells me whether or no its moment has come."

Then, still quietly, he went to the long window and stepped out upon the balcony. The night was wonderful from the height of Chapultepec; it was lit with peaceful stars, a myriad life murmured along its slopes, the breeze lifted to a cool lightness; and Tom Kildare stood looking out upon it, waiting; and, though his mind denied it, with something like fear stirring in his heart.

KILDARE never knew how long he stood there; for after the first quiet moment of waiting, his thoughts carried him away, carried him back as thoughts will do, and he saw himself on that spring morning in the public room of the hotel at St. Joe, in Missouri; he again heard a voice that stopped his heart, and he saw a face that he never forgot from that moment. And then his mind went to Espirito Santo; again that voice; and again, in the wide, sudden gleam from the opening door, the beautiful face with its frightened eyes! Bells rang, crowds thronged about, organs pealed; he was on the edge of the Plaza and she was there and he spoke to her and she answered; and there were feelings in his breast and thoughts in his mind that had never been there before.

And now he looked up at her from the quiet star-lit garden; he stood in the wide room with her and his arms were about her; with the rush of armed men sounding on the stairs, he had said he'd come back for her. And he had come! The night before, he had. With those rare, roistering, dare-devil young Confederates guarding him round about, he had run off with her; and that morning she had taken the road with him to Padre Sebastian's chapel where he'd meant to make her his wife. But the arm of a government is strong, and it had stretched out between them, and now——

A sound brought him back to the present; thoughts of what was already recorded in the book of his mind left him; for it was Annetta's voice he heard; and turning, he saw her. She was standing white, but smiling, facing Theresa Reuchard, and at her side was the Mexican, Vicente Rayon.

"I DO not know," Annetta was saying, "that I am in any way accountable to you." She looked at the Frenchwoman, and there was disdain in her eyes. "I am, I think, the best judge of my own affairs."

"His arms were about you!" said Theresa Reuchard.

"And what if they were?" said Annetta. "Am I, then, to ask your permission in such things?" She laughed; and there was scorn in her manner as she looked at Rayon. "But Señor Rayon says nothing; it may be different with him; perhaps he feels that he is, in some way, bound to offer you an explanation."

There was a set look in the face of Vicente Rayon as he turned upon the Frenchwoman; his cold eyes held a sneer.

"I think it is well understood," said he, "that I am not one to explain my actions in anything."

There was a dark anger in the eyes of Theresa Reuchard; her hands were clenched as she faced the man and said:

"Not in *anything*, Vicente? Are you quite sure of that? Is this, again, another matter in which I must stand aside because of your ambition?" She laughed, and the laugh had a bitter ring. "But, oh, no! Your desire for power, your craving for authority, your hope to regain an empire for exploitation by yourself and your friends, was one thing. This is another. You were always selfish, Vicente. You seldom thought of me. But I made no complaint. I planned and I sought and I schemed wherever I saw a chance for your advancement. I always realized that what I gained for you came first in your mind; I knew I myself must take only what consideration you could spare. No, Vicente, when your ambition blocked my way to you, I said nothing. But ambition is one thing—a woman is another; and when you show me openly that another woman has gained your love, the moment has come when I shall say a great deal." He was silent, and again she laughed. "I shall say a great deal, Vicente; but I shall *do* a great deal more!"

There was a sudden pallor in his face, and a look of fear came into his eyes; for a moment it seemed as if he meant to try to pacify the infuriated woman; but then Annetta spoke swiftly.

"Say what you like," she said, and her eyes defied Theresa. "And do anything you have a mind to do." Her white hand went out to Rayon. "No word or act of yours can turn a man of courage from his desire."

The eyes of Rayon, as he looked at the girl, were filled with sudden passion; he grasped her hand and held it tightly; and to Theresa he said:

"What she says, I say. From now on I am done with pretending." And as the Frenchwoman stood staring at him, almost incredulously, he continued: "And another thing! There is nothing that you can do that will injure me, that will not injure yourself. Do you think I am a fool not to see that?" The mocking smile so often on his lips was there as he looked at her. "I know you have always held your influence over me as a threat; but you have overestimated your power, Theresa; the things you are able to control are of little consequence."

At this there was a look of triumph on Annetta's face; her small white hands held to the Mexican's sleeve, and she looked up at him.

"Vicente!" she said. "I knew you had courage! I knew you would speak like a man."

The smile she gave Rayon, the eagerness in her voice, caused a sudden faintness in the heart of Kildare. He put his arms against one of the supports of the balcony and leaned his head against them.

His mind was suddenly numb, his body felt cold, his very pulse seemed to have stopped. And somehow, for a vast space of time, he was alone; everything had gone from him; he was alone amidst a great dreariness, and the thought that his life must go on frightened him. Leaden skies were over him; dull, bleak spaces were all about, and he suffered intolerably. Then, after a time, sounds came to him; people were speaking, and their voices were from a distant place. One voice was clear and sweet and low, and a shudder crept into his blood, for in its clearness he saw treachery, in the sweet gentleness was a cold, appalling thing.

There was a second voice; it came dimly to Kildare's dulled mind, and was filled with mockery, derision, defiance; the voice of Theresa Reuchard was lifted up against it; it asked fierce, heated questions which had to do with vast tracts of country, rich and desirable places—of traffic—of great wealth and power, and authority. And now Kildare heard the tones of Cortizar, the Emperor's counselor, somehow newly come to this vague, distant place of voices; and Cortizar made answer to these questions. His words were smooth, his thoughts were like rivers of oil flowing through level places. Here was Paris; and here was the heavy-eyed Napoleon III, who had planned so carefully and hoped so greatly; and here were the rosy, smiling Paris bankers, and the stout burghers of the manufacturing towns, all with their open hands held out awaiting the flood of treasure. But the American Civil War was over, the government at Washington possessed mighty armies, and the crafty Louis feared to reach out and clutch what he had thought would be his reward. And because Louis Napoleon was afraid, Maximilian, in Mexico, waited.

Again came the far-off voice of Theresa Reuchard, fierce, insistent, questioning. Yes, Maximilian waited. But for what? There was a blank space here, for no one spoke; it was a blank space filled with the futilities of princes, the vast, purposeless movements of empires, treachery, lies, double-dealing, despair. Then the answer came. Maximilian waited for the counsel of Cortizar; if the wisdom of that statesman so advised, Mexico and its European allies would bid boldly for dominion in the far West. And now came a whirl of voices, one lifted against the other, pleading, judging, condemning; and out of it the dulled senses of Kildare got this: Maximilian looked to Cortizar for advice in this matter. And, in turn, Cortizar was advised by Theresa Reuchard.

And, only the day before, Theresa had advised him to favor the grasping of all those great lands; but now she had changed her mind. Thin, bitter with triumph, her meaning came through the arid spaces of Kildare's brain. She now said "No!" Again the confusing strife of voices and through it were threats and defiances. And now Cortizar could stay no longer. Somewhere in the great distance Kildare heard a door shut; there was a silence after this, a silence in which death groped. Then followed a revolver shot, a scream, and a heavy fall. With an effort of will, Tom Kildare wrenched his mind from amidst the dull mists that held it; lifting his head, he looked into the room beyond. He saw Annetta Prentiss crouched in white terror against the far wall; Rayon stood motionless, a revolver in his hand; and stretched at his feet lay the beautiful Theresa Reuchard—dead!

THE window where Kildare stood was a tall one; Annetta saw and cried out to him; but then came a rush of palace guards, courtiers thronged into the room; women cried out in alarm; through the door opening into the place of the petitioners the Emperor could be seen, ringed with flashing sabers and carbines at full cock.

It seemed to Annetta that many eyes were looking at her accusingly, and that a score of hands reached toward her in menace; things whirled giddily, and then darkness came. When she recovered consciousness she was lying on a sofa with a little knot of people gathered about her; some one was kneeling at her side; her hands were held tightly in two strong ones, and she heard Tom Kildare saying:

"She is mine. No man, or woman, either, has the right to give her to another. She is mine, and nothing will make me give her up. When I go, she goes with me."

"Very well." It was Maximilian who spoke; he stood only a few feet away, and Cortizar, yellow-gray with shock, was at his side. "Mexico has every regard for General Sheridan, and desires to treat his courier well; but the truth is, you have been a source of turmoil since your arrival, and the girl has been little less. So we recommend that you take horse as soon as possible, carrying her with you, since you desire her so much, and make your way to the Texas border."

Here old Simon Prentiss spoke hastily, crabbedly, in protest; but the Emperor coldly waved him away. There was more talk, some of it angry, some explanatory, and through it all the strong hands held her own and courage came to her in the clasp. Then she felt herself lifted; she was in Tom's arms; he was carrying her through the courtiers, through the armed men, out of the castle of Chapultepec. She felt the night air upon her face, gratefully cool; still in his arms, she felt the long, swift motion of a horse under them. As they went forward Kildare talked to some one; it was young Glade, who, good friend that he was, rode at their side.

Then there was a gate that must be opened; here was an adobe chapel under the spreading trees; here was a knocking upon a door. Then she heard the voice of that stout, kindly Padre Sebastian, first in surprised exclamation, and then in great joy. In the chapel, candles were lighted; the padre fumbled at his vestments with eager hands, breathlessly he hunted for the book which held the marriage lines. She was to be married! To Tom! He still held her, her face was close to his; she felt his kiss upon her cheek. Then in the midst of her joy she had a thrill of fear; she recalled how she had seen him framed in the window an instant after Rayon fired the shot that killed Theresa Reuchard. He must have been there for some time! He must have heard her words! He might have taken the part she had played for truth! And so she began to tell him of what she had planned to do. But his kisses stopped her.

"Hush!" he said. "Don't speak. You frightened me at the time, but Glade has explained it all to me. The courage of you, agra, to do the like! Oh, the courage of you! And the foolishness of me to think even for a moment that you loved a man like that."

And now the words were being said that made her his wife; she gave the responses firmly, and the eager ring in his voice as he gave his filled her with peace. Then it was all over; they said their good-bys to the padre and to Glade at the little gate. She was to ride Glade's horse; the night was before them, the hills were rugged and the way long, but that was nothing. She was to be with him. He was her husband. She was to be with him now, come good, come evil, and for more than that she did not ask.

A LITTLE camp was pitched upon the side of one of the many rocky hills which rear their rough heads between Mexico City and the port of Vera Cruz. Two horses were picketed at a little distance, one of which, by the cock of his ears, was Pepper. And a shelter, with a fire burning before it, was set up in the shadow of some trees. Upon a blanket at the door of the shelter sat Annetta, and propped up on one elbow was Kildare. Far away the dawn was breaking and a coppery sheen hung in the sky.

"That's over the city," said Kildare, after they had looked in silence for a time.

"Tom!" Her hand was upon his arm. "I shall always think of Mexico City as a place of tragedy. There is something about it——"

She ended with a little shiver of dread and pressed close to him.

"It has always been a place of tragedy, agra," said the tall trooper, gravely, as he smoothed the dark hair back from her face. "And it will continue to be, I'm afraid, these many years to come. But, mavourneen"—he kissed her upon the cheek—"I'll always feel kindly toward it. For it was there that I won you—it was there that the good priest gave you to me; and that's enough to brighten the grimmest thought that could come into a man's mind."

"Dear Tom," she said. "We'll be happy, won't we?"

"Happy! Please God, we will, asthore. Forever and ever, till the end of the road."

THE END

Self-Respect

The Unusual, Dramatic Method That One Man Chose for Regaining That Which He Had Lost

By Albert Richard Wetjen

IT WAS some time after the retreat. The little clearing hummed with life. The encircling jungle walls were alive with color, gaudy and cruel. Kaura, chief of the coast tribes of San Cristoval, opened his eyes at last for the first time since he had closed them on the foredeck of the schooner *Kronstadt*, when the yellow-mustached white man who was master of the ship had hit him with a gun-butt. The sullen-faced, naked warriors crowding around raised a booming chant of thankfulness.

The sun was low in the sky and shadows were growing deeper and cooler as well as longer. The jungle life quieted down a little and murmured soothingly to itself, as though weary of the baking day. Soon it would retire altogether for a while, until the moon rose and the night prowlers woke from their sleep, when the dull murmur would break forth again.

It was nearly two miles from the village of Kaura to the V-shaped river mouth where the *Kronstadt* had been cut off and now lay at anchor. The exhausted warriors had halted in the little clearing about half-way to tend to their chief and to bind up their own wounds, sending runners ahead to the village with the tidings of defeat. Already the women were wailing there for the dead, and old men were mumbling from toothless gums how they had said it would be so. Lucy Tree, bound hand and foot with harsh-skinned lianas, lay to one side of the clearing with a guard of two warriors. She was gazing dry-eyed at the sky, a circle of deep blue fringed with tree tops. She was terribly afraid.

She had been warned that a recruiting cruise to the savage Solomon Archipelago was not a pleasure trip for ladies. She had driven her father, Maddison Tree, the great plantation and schooner owner of Apia, nearly mad with her insistence that she must go. And here was the result. She, who had never before in her life been out of call of a white man who would die to protect her, was in the grip of the cannibals of San Cristoval, and already deep in the jungle near their village.

Kaura sat up with an effort, helped by his favorite son, a stalwart young savage with a long bone skewer thrust through his nose, causing him to breathe with a sniffing noise. The surrounding warriors fell back a pace as the old man's hollow eyes swept over them and then round the clearing, across the blue of the evening sky, now turning pink, and finally to his son, supporting him on one blood-stained arm. He allowed his gaze to rest on the young man's fierce face for a moment and then he caught sight of the white girl. A flicker twitched his thin lips, and then he grew grim and terrible again. His eyes burned.

He drew in a deep breath, wheezed and coughed, spitting blood on the ground by his side. His lips quivered. His head ached frightfully, but he had been born in pain and had lived in the midst of it until he was hardly conscious of it. Memory came to him slowly, assisted by a sharp twinge from his roughly handled and bruised old flesh.

"And the thin man?" he snarled. "He of the yellow hair?"

The warriors cringed away and lowered their eyes. Even Kaura's son shrank before his father's anger. There was tense silence in the clearing.

"Well?"

Still no one spoke. Livid wrath blazed through the old chief. He forced himself to his feet by sheer strength of will and roughly flung his son aside. He guessed what had happened and the knowledge galled him. Unafraid to die himself, long past the days when his senses and their gratifications supplied a reason to live, he was as careless of the lives of others as he was of his own. He himself would have fought until he was cut to pieces. And, being chief, he held his warriors to the same code. He glared at each man separately, taking his time. Their bodies trembled a little. Still no one spoke.

Kaura swung round on his son and showed his few remaining teeth in an ugly snarl. The necklace of babies' jawbones round his throat jangled horribly. The furrows and wrinkles of his scalp and face seemed to sink in deeper.

"You, Maru, should lead when I fall. For you are my son. Yet I do not see heads hanging from your loins, nor do I see meat for the ovens borne on the shoulders of the young men."

The favorite son of Kaura, he whom the chief had raised in his own hut, allowed to eat and sleep beside him, taught to hunt and trail, hung his head with shame and his breast quivered with mortification. His hands hung heavily at his side and his spear trailed the foot-trodden grass.

"Thy spear!"

The young man quivered at the command and raised his head. His eyes pleaded with his father, who returned the gaze unwinking. The warriors grew tense as they waited. The sweat burst in tiny nodules on Lucy Tree's forehead. Terror clawed at her scalp. She would have screamed, but her throat refused to obey her. No one moved for a long time. Then slowly the spear changed hands.

Kaura, rocking on his feet with exhaustion and weariness, drew back a pace and raised his arm. His son sank his head again with a deep sigh. He had looked his last upon war and women, upon the sun and the jungle and the sky. No more would his blood run hot with the touch of love or . . . The spear-head stood out a clear inch between the shoulder-blades. It was a good stroke from an exhausted old man and the warriors grunted approval. The young man was a long time falling.

Kaura sighed as he ground his heel into his son's face and twisted to the narrow game trail that led through the jungle to the village. He glanced at the captive woman for a moment and his eyes glittered with pleasure. She was looking at him dully, almost without interest. Kaura removed his gaze with a grunt and shot a quick look at the corpse.

"We go to mourn," he said briefly, and led the way toward the distant village at a staggering trot that betrayed his weakness.

The warriors followed slowly, two of them bringing the girl. The dead man stayed behind for the ants that already were scutting across the clearing to start the feast before the birds arrived. The shadows were softening with the close of the brief evening when the clearing grew silent again.

THE decks of the *Kronstadt* were a revolting sight. The dead piled the galley door where the cook had made a stand with his cleaver. The scuppers held dead. The foot of the two companions leading to the poop had each its heap of bodies. Spears stuck from the planking like pins from a pin-cushion. Shot-marks plowed the bulkheads of the deckhouses. On the poop, under the torn awnings, three men were alive, of all the ship's company.

The *Kronstadt* had sailed from Apia with fifteen hands, a large crew for a schooner of her size, but needed for the dangerous business of recruiting Kanaka labor for the southern plantations. Of the fifteen, four had been white men, the captain, two mates and the supercargo. The supercargo and one of the mates, the first, were dead. The second mate sat on the deck near the forward poop taffrail and tried to bind the stump of his right arm with a large silk handkerchief. Captain Mulvaney, of the yellow hair, nursed a dozen wounds, sitting on the rail itself and breathing heavily from his recent exertions. The third man was naked to the waist; his white silk shirt hung in ribbons about his thighs, and his body was reddened with blood and streaked with gashes. He drew in his breath with great gulps. This was Jerrold Frazer; his income was just fifty thousand a year, and he was on the *Kronstadt* because Lucy Tree, whom he wanted to marry, had insisted on coming. He sat near Mulvaney on the taffrail and gazed stupidly at the deck.

"The last—dynamite—had four sticks tied—together—did it," asserted the captain in a sleepy voice. He was fast weakening from loss of blood. The second mate cursed violently as he succeeded in getting a bandage round his wrist; and then promptly fainted. Neither of the other two men took any notice.

"Must say—I was mistaken 'bout you. . . . Blasted dude—come away with us. . . . Girl nuisance, but dude worse. . . . Sorry. . . . You fight like—like hell." The captain's voice was even sleepier, his head sank lower on his breast, his great hands let go the revolvers he clutched and the weapons fall to the deck with a thud. He gripped the teak rail and sighed.

The cutting off of the *Kronstadt* had been totally unexpected. Captain Mulvaney had recruited labor many times before from the river mouth on the coast of San Cristoval. He had grown careless. Kaura, the wise old savage, had not. Opportunity had come. The failure to put barbed-wire barriers round the schooner had been an oversight not to be ignored by the old cannibal chief. He had merely waited till the schooner anchored. Then his canoes had poured out on her. The fight had been bloody. Luckily the captain had not forgotten to get the dynamite fused and ready for attack. That was all that had partly saved the day. Lucy Tree had been taken off more as a curiosity because she was a white woman. So soon as Kaura had seen her he had given orders for her to be taken alive. He had his share of curiosity and he had never seen a white woman before.

"Got to—get out of here. . . . All dead but you—me an' Clony here. . . . He's shot t' pieces. . . . Girl gone. . . . Good as dead. . . . No use. . . . Kaura come back by—by. . . . Hell, I'm sick — sick — sick as hell. . . ." There was a dull thud and, rousing himself with an effort, Jerrold Frazer saw that the captain had fallen face forward to the deck and lay still. The second mate was still unconscious.

Frazer gazed stupidly at the two prostrate seamen and ran a shaking hand across his forehead. He didn't know what to do. He was no schooner man, was not used to puzzling out situations. He had never had to, had never before been expected to. He groaned. Why had Lucy insisted on going on such a perfectly preposterous adventure?

"Call yourself a man?" she had said and had looked at his soft hands and pink, smooth-shaven face. Of course he had had to go. And Lucy's harassed father had been only too pleased to see him go to look after his daughter. Of course the chaperon had come along, too—old Mother Sinlay as Apia called her—the widow of Jake who had once kept the big saloon near. . . . He wondered where she was now and turned slowly about to gaze along the deck.

He looked for quite a while before he caught sight of her white hair, now dappled and matted, among the bodies by the galley. They must have killed her, the beasts. And Lucy? He started and trembled violently. He remembered he had seen her carried overside on the shoulder of a stalwart savage, alive and shrieking. He had been too busy fighting at the moment to try to save her. And now—he peered sidewise at the jungle—she was somewhere in there, gone with the flying cannibals.

CAPTAIN MULVANEY came to for a moment and sat up with a groan. He saw the young man still on his feet beside him.

"Get the gin," he muttered, indistinctly.

Frazer caught his meaning and tottered aft to the wheel where the white men aboard had been drinking just as the attack came. He found a third-full bottle of gin and brought it to the captain after taking a drink himself. Strange how alcohol gave strength. The captain, too, was able to get on his feet after a mouthful.

"We've gotta get out of this," mumbled the man with the yellow mustache as he peered along the reeking decks. "You c'm'long and help me get up sail an' knock anchor clear. Then——"

"No use to go—without Lucy," the young man protested, and took another drink from the bottle.

The captain grunted and started to tie up some of his wounds, tearing pieces of the ribboned shirt from the other's waist.

"No good waiting for her. We've got to get out of this ourselves. She's a gone coon and even old Maddison wouldn't—wouldn't expect us——"

"No." The young man shook his head obstinately. He gripped the teak rail hard. "No. We can't leave a woman. Don't you see, a woman? It'd be different if it was a man, but a white woman."

"C-can't do a thing, you fool. . . . Got to get out of this. Certain death to look for girl. . . . Sorry—but—see . . ." He flopped at the knees and fainted again.

Jerrold Frazer finished the rest of the spirits in the bottle and went unsteadily down to the main deck among the bodies. He stopped midships and looked toward the sullen jungle fringing the river shore, perhaps fifty yards each side from where the *Kronstadt* lay. Lucy had gone somewhere in that jungle. He reached the rail along the ship's side and leaned on it, still breathing somewhat heavily. It was entirely up to him. He knew that. Captain Mulvaney would not blame him for doing nothing. He had said it was certain death to try.

IT CAME to Frazer that he had many reasons for wanting to live. The world was good and fair, and he had the money to make it more so. Yes, he wanted very much to live. Certain death in the jungle. And he was a greenhorn. Every minute the schooner lay at anchor her chances of getting away decreased. His brain was fuddled, his thoughts chaotic. Certain death, of course—but—but—there were other things. Life was not all. No man could live with himself and have that on his mind. A white girl alone in the jungle. Alone!

Why, a man who left her would never be able to forget! He did not know. The way seemed so plain. Yet it also led to death. And he didn't want to die. It was impossible for him to do any good. Not only would he kill himself, but also the captain and the second mate. Could they get the schooner away alone? Again he did not know. He was such a green young man to be in savage parts. He swayed a little and clutched at the rail to prevent himself from falling. He heard Captain Mulvaney's weak voice calling insistently:

"No good—throw fool life away. . . . She's gone. . . . Kaura—hold her. . . . No good. . . ." Then silence. Perhaps the captain had fainted once more.

But there were other things besides life. Self-respect. No other way. No white man could go out to sea and leave—alone in the jungle. Impossible to think. Entirely a matter of self-respect.

He very suddenly leaned over the rail and fell, rather than dived overboard.

The shock of the cold water revived him somewhat and he set his face to the shore and started to swim. Strength flowed back. The liquor was getting in its work and his head was clearer. A swim of fifty yards had never seemed so long before. He coughed river water from his mouth and scrambled at last among the sago and short mangroves. The mud was sticky and clinging, but it was dryer farther inland. He laughed shakily as he thrust onward. It was entirely a matter of self-respect.

He found the jungle trail after stumbling for barely a hundred yards. Grimly he kept it. Not that he knew it led in the right direction, but it was easier walking, far easier than the pure jungle where the tree trunks and the harsh-skinned lianas stripped the skin from his naked shoulders He traveled very slowly, crawling sometimes, weak from fighting and loss of blood. Perhaps it was well, for he did not reach the little clearing until Kaura and his warriors had disappeared down the trail.

Frazer stopped for several minutes and gazed down on the dead body of Maru, the son of Kaura, and wondered vaguely why the man had been slain. He laughed again, shakily, and plucking the spear from the corpse with some effort went on along the path.

When he eventually reached the village, meeting no one because all were mourning, it was nearly dark. He crouched in the undergrowth on the outskirts of the huts and watched with tired eyes and beating heart the semicircle of women wailing for the dead and the knots of silent, sullen naked men standing around and talking in low tones. A few cooking fires were alight and some pigs and yams were roasting. Frazer could see no sign of either Kaura or Lucy and as night was so near he decided he had better wait before making any further advance until the darkness came to cloak his movements. That he had reached the spot where the girl was captive he did not doubt.

Withdrawing from the village for about a quarter of a mile, he found a patch of wild taro and burrowing into the midst of it he lay down and slept. Nor did the vicious biting of many insects wake him, so deep was his slumber.

THE moon was just rising over the tree tops when he awoke, and he rolled over with a groan. Many sore little lumps all over him told where the little jungle people had been busy while he slept. His joints had stiffened and his every muscle ached violently. He set his teeth, struggled up, and crept back toward the village.

As he drew near the large cluster of huts a strange sound struck his ear. He stopped and listened, unable to believe his senses at first. But there could be no mistake. It seemed impossible, but unless he were mad it was so. A piano! A piano playing Tosti's "Good-by" in the heart of the jungle!

The women had forgotten to wail according to the ancient law and were listening intently. Frazer, drawing close, spellbound, astonished, saw that every soul in the village, from the babes in arms to the dying old men, was gathered near the great hut that stood in the center of the village. The people formed a huge squatting semicircle before the square doorway. A little in front sat Kaura himself, his knees crossed and his bony scarred hands nursing them. On one side of him sat the priest and on the other one of his sons. All were staring intently into the hut doorway.

Uncanny it was under the silver light of the moon that threw ink-black shadows and touched high spots with vivid color. Concealed behind the first hut he reached, Frazer watched for a long time and was still puzzled. He had forgotten he was weak and sore. At the conclusion of "Good-by" the piano throbbed away to silence. But still the semicircle remained unmoved, rigid. Then there appeared in the hut door a slight figure in torn white duck, with tousled hair.

Lucy Tree smiled pathetically and brushed one shaking hand across her brow. She ran her staring eyes over the intent throng and shuddered. Only a miracle had saved her from the cooking fires that night, now glowing like evil red eyes in the light and shadow.

Kaura straightened with a start and gestured. He shot a few words, which sounded like a command, to the girl and after a moment she withdrew into the hut and the sound of the piano broke forth again. It was evident to the astonished Frazer that she understood somewhat the dialect of San Cristoval. He remembered that her father's servants were Islanders. That might account for it. The tune now was the love song from "Samson and Delilah."

Soon he moved away, realizing that he had an opportunity he might never get again. Hope came to him for the first time. Not a savage was likely to see him or discover him. All were gathered before the hut door, their eyes fixed unwinkingly. Frazer worked round behind the great hut, which cast a black deep shadow that reached to a smaller hut, giving him perfect cover. He could depend on it that the natives could not see into the shadow on the other side of the hut, their own side being in the moonlight. But to make doubly sure the now excited Frazer rubbed earth all over himself to deaden the gleam of his stained white trousers and his fair, blood-stained skin. Then he dropped to the ground and groped forward cautiously.

He reached the side of the great hut and the sound of the piano deadened any noise he made. He burrowed one forefinger through the dried leaves of the wall and applied his eye.

A SMOKING torch stuck in a sort of long stone jar gave a flickering red light. Around the walls, high up, mats and skulls were hung, a few spears, sharks'-teeth necklaces, one or two whale's teeth, purple with age. Mats covered the floor. But in the center of the hut stood the strangest furnishing, a large grand piano, evidently once of polished mahogany or walnut, but now mottled with fungus and somewhat worm-eaten.

How it came to be there in the great hut was a mystery that would never be explained. It might have been shipwreck that brought it there. It was remotely possible it had been traded for something of great value. More likely it had been looted from some cut-off vessel. At any rate, there it was, falling into ruin, out of tune, but still a piano. And before it, sitting on a low case that had once contained schnapps, was Lucy Tree, the perspiration gleaming on her face in the hot light, her slim hands trembling with excitement and nervousness as they sped over the still gleaming keys. Very skilfully she played, despite the broken strings and hammers. All around her and the piano stood jars and calabashes of food and drink, various offerings to the strange god, the piano.

Frazer chose a place where the torch cast only a flickering shadow and no light, and proceeded to burrow a hole large enough for him to pass through.

At the end of every tune the girl would go to the hut door and bow a little, though there was no applause. She would breathe the fresh air for a few moments until the wonder-struck and fascinated Kaura ordered her back. Thus she played two airs before Frazer had his hole finished, and he crawled through under cover of a smashing chord.

Frazer crawled noiselessly to the back of the piano and then round to the side. He waited until Lucy had finished the piece she was playing. Then he spoke in a whisper, tuned to reach her ears alone:

"Lucy! Don't be afraid. Don't let them see you're listening. This is Jerrold. Tell them you can play better with the torch out. Quick!"

For a moment the man thought she was going to faint and deliberately he dug his thumb into the calf of her leg. She stifled the scream that rose to her lips. She forced her tired eyes to conceal their sudden gleam and, rising shakily with a half sob, went to the hut door as she had done before. Kaura's inevitable command to continue came and the girl said something in the dialect. There was no hesitation. Kaura was in the mood to grant anything. At a command an awestruck native entered the hut, his eyes fixed wonderingly on the frail white girl, whom he now looked on as a supernatural being. He removed the torch and carried it out, and the hut was plunged into darkness. Lucy groped her way to the wooden case and sat down trembling. She cried a little.

"I'm so glad. . . . Let me feel your hand, Jerrold. I'm afraid—afraid. Oh, God, I've been playing here for hours," she moaned in a low voice.

Hastily Frazer caught her hand. He squeezed it and patted her shoulder.

"Buck up," he whispered hoarsely. "Play the most gripping thing you know. As soon as you're through catch my hand and come with me. They'll wait for you at the door and that'll give us a few moments."

The voice of Kaura came from the outside and the girl started violently and shivered.

"Kiss me, Jerrold," she whispered, sobbing. "I won't ever be nasty to you again."

Their lips met in the dark, and then she played again, missing a note here and there in her excitement. Beyond the doorway, the eager faces of the natives showed clear-cut and plain. The whites of their eyes glistened. The ridges on Kaura's scalp stood out with astonishing clearness.

The music swept to its climax, hovered for a moment and then suddenly ceased. Lucy had swept the savage minds into the thrall of sound and after the sound had ceased she still held them. With the last note Frazer seized her hand and guided her to the hole he had made. He thrust her through and followed himself. Carefully the two of them stole across the blackness of the shadow cast by the great hut until they reached the next hut, round which they crept and so at last reached the outskirts of the village. They could make more noise now and hurried through the jungle until they struck the trail. Then they ran.

For nearly two minutes the savages remained in a motionless state of fascination. Their eyes searched the hut door for the white form of the girl to appear from the darkness. She did not come and yet the spell held the dark-skinned people silent for a minute longer. Then Kaura called a command into the hut that the noise continue, but he received no answer. He called again and still there was no answer. Then he ordered a woman to go into the hut and see what was the matter. But the woman cringed and hesitated. She was afraid to enter in the pitch blackness wherein the strange god and the white woman crouched, perhaps waiting to devour her. Kaura ordered her again with a snarl of impatience, but again, and for the first time in history and legend, a woman disobeyed a tribal chieftain. She was killed for that. It was Kaura himself finally who, with a sharp word of censure, seized a firebrand and entered the hut door, though not without some superstitious twinges. It did not take him long to see what had happened. The hole in the wall, the unmistakable marks of Frazer's shoes. Furiously Kaura called his warriors. But by that time the fugitives had fifteen minutes' start.

DESPITE the moon the high jungle wrapped the narrow trail in dense blackness and it was a stumbling, blind flight the lovers had to make. They reached the little clearing in an unbelievably short time, for fear is a great spur, and came into the trail beyond about when Kaura discovered their escape.

They reached the muddy shores of the V-shaped river mouth at last and the *Kronstadt* floated like a shapely double shadow in a pool of quicksilver. Frazer was exhausted, and the girl had fainted some ten minutes before. He had been carrying her. He roused her a little by bathing her forehead and knew a cold clutch at his heart when he remembered she could not swim.

"Hold on to my neck and just hang limp," he muttered fiercely as he waded out into deep water. He knew he was draining now the very last dregs of his strength. He had ceased to be conscious of the movements he made. Only his will worked and drove his body to obey. He had to save the girl. That was all he knew. He struck out savagely. Quickly his strength failed. He swam more slowly, fighting with a sobbing despair against the current that was threatening to sweep him past the *Kronstadt*.

He rasped alongside the rough plank hull of the schooner at last and panted. There was no ladder up to the rail. He had forgotten that. The girl was dragging him down like a sodden log. He believed she had fainted again. He knew, he never knew how, that her hair was trailing like a cloud on the water behind him. He lifted his voice and exhausted himself with a shout.

"Mulvaney! . . . Here!"

There came the slow dragging of shoes on the deck, an astonished oath, then the creak of a body leaning on the taffrail. A weak voice called.

"Who's that?"

Frazer managed another call, little more than a whisper.

"*Here! . . . Here!*"

The yellow-mustached face of the captain appeared over the rail, staring down foolishly. He made a desperate effort to pull himself together when he caught sight of the swimmer who was reaching upward despairingly and trying to clutch with bleeding fingers at the rough hull that offered no hand-hold.

"Gawd!" he muttered, profoundly astonished.

Somehow, within his shattered frame, the captain found a little strength. He dragged himself to a coil of rope and flung the end overboard. Then he moved along the rail until Frazer caught at the rope end and hung on. So far so good. But he could not think for some time how he was to get the two aboard. Then an idea came to him.

He tottered to the locker that was clamped to the poop deck alongside the saloon skylight, and fished out a wood-and-rope pilot ladder that was kept there in case it was necessary to send a man overside to attend to the rudder. With vast effort and exasperating slowness the captain got the coiled ladder to the side, unfastened it and lowered one end to Frazer, making the other fast to the poop taffrail by its lanyards. The captain was forced to stop at intervals and rest in accomplishing this, even though he was spurred by the knowledge that Frazer could not hold on much longer. But at last it was done.

"CATCH hold of the ladder," he directed, leaning overside. Mechanically the man below obeyed. His wrists ached intolerably and Lucy's weight on his back was growing heavier. Her arms were so tight around his throat he could hardly breathe. He wondered dully whether he should let go and get it all over with. Death was not painful. Death was free from aches and pains and fears and worries. Only life hurt. Then he was aware that the captain was speaking slowly again.

"I've tied a bowline in the end of the line," he was saying. "See if you can get it under the girl's arms."

Without reasoning what the captain's motive was Frazer attempted to obey. Weighted as it was on the bottom rung, the pilot ladder hung fairly straight down in the water and Frazer's searching feet found a rung eventually and he was able to relieve the strain on his wrists. He broke the girl's hold round his throat after a good deal of twisting and wrenching and tugging, a kind of sobbing hysteria taking possession of him just then and giving him a spasm of strength. He held her limp body by the long hair while he slipped the bowline under one arm, his own arm thrust through the pilot ladder to balance him. Then he changed hands and managed to get the loop under the girl's other arm.

The captain, watching everything with sick dread and swimming eyes, knowing that the current would float the girl away should Frazer let her go, saw what had been accomplished and called, "Let her go!"

Mechanically Frazer let her go. She sank; but the captain held to the line where it went over the rail and he feebly hauled it up until the girl's face broke water and she could breathe. Then he made the line fast and left Lucy suspended in the water.

Frazer was now hanging on to the pilot ladder with both hands, his feet on a rung. His eyes were shut and his head dropped on his breast. He was hardly awake now. He gripped on because his fingers had set and he had not the will to let go. But for Mulvaney he would have died gripping the ladder.

CURSING his weakness the captain obtained another line and dropped the end down to Frazer. It struck the young man's head but he did not flinch.

"Catch hold of that," the captain whispered hoarsely. "I can help you a bit if you try to climb by hauling on the rope."

Frazer made no move and did not reply. The captain shook the pilot ladder feebly, causing it to sway sidewise. He raised his voice in a feeble, angry shout.

"Frazer! For God's sake, man—try——"

Frazer raised his head for a moment, but his eyes were shut.

"Whasmarrer?" he mumbled drowsily.

The captain swore.

"Catch hold! Catch hold, do you hear?"

He wriggled the line he had flung down. And Frazer, dominated by the voice and the will of the other, groped blindly for the line and held on to it. And, further, he commenced to climb, the captain putting what little strength he had onto the line in an effort to aid him aboard. It took nearly half an hour to accomplish the short distance and several times the captain thought he had seen Jerrold Frazer for the last time. That was whenever the groping feet failed to find a rung. In the end Frazer doubled over the rail and went limp, and the captain applied the final desperate jerk that toppled him onto the schooner's deck. He lay there running with water and motionless, huddled and white-faced and streaked with dirt and blood, panting. The girl still was suspended from the rail, in no immediate danger of drowning.

The captain rested for a long time and then tottered once more to the rail. He looked down at the girl and shook his head. He tried to haul up on the rope but the weight was too much. He gave it up and subsided on one of the long cane chairs on the poop to wait. He wanted desperately to sleep—sleep. Loss of blood had drained him of energy. He drowsily cursed Frazer for a fool. And just then the warriors of Kaura broke through the jungle edge and reached the shores of the river.

Terrible cries brought the captain's drooping head up with a jerk. He set his teeth and groaned and swayed to his feet once more. The moon flooded the river bank with silver light, cutting very short the shadows of the sago and mangrove trees. One or two of the savages had waded into the water and were shading their eyes and gazing toward the schooner. The rest could be seen merely as a dark moving mass in the shadow behind them.

The men in the water caught sight of the white floating form of Lucy Tree and pointed excitedly. Kaura waded out to them and peered across the shining water. Then he turned and waved his arm and shouted something to his warriors. They scattered through the mangroves.

Captain Mulvaney swore bitterly. He forced his tortured, trembling body to his bidding and secured a rifle and some ammunition. Then he made a slow way forward, falling down the poop companion to the main deck and so to the main hatch. On the top of the hatch half a box of dynamite lay, and each stick was short-fused for quick firing. The other half of the box had been used in the first attack.

Carrying all the sticks he could, the captain returned wearily to the poop and set them down. Then he shakily lit a cigar from a box that still lay on the poop deck. He puffed the cigar into a glowing butt and then staggered to the rail again. He laid his rifle down, ready-cocked for firing, laid two revolvers beside it, together with a couple of boxes of cartridges, and then knelt down with a sigh. He was too weak to fight on his feet. He doubted, indeed, whether he could fight at all, but he was going to try. He didn't call it self-respect, though. He called it sheer necessity.

Many of his wounds had commenced bleeding afresh with his exertions and his bandages were blood-stained and wet in many places. Ghastly he looked with a small patch of his yellow-haired head showing between the crisscross layers of white cloth, his eyes barely visible through the contorted lids and under the contracted brows, screwed up tense with pain. He leaned one arm on the rail and hung his head while he waited. It felt too heavy to hold up. But Frazer had done his really foolish best, had worked out every last bit of energy and all but life itself doing what he shouldn't ever have tried to do, and was still lying unconscious and wet on the deck. The girl was still hanging unconscious from her rope. The second mate was moaning quietly to himself with the agony of his pulped hand, and so the only one to fight was the captain.

If it had been only for himself he would have collapsed limply and waited his fate with indifference, or perhaps have sent a shot through his own head. But there were the others. Jerrold Frazer the dude had achieved what no experienced man would have attempted. The captain could hardly admit that he was not as good a man as his passenger.

The savages had found their canoes now and were launching them rapidly. Perhaps a dozen of the small craft appeared on the moonlit water, Kaura in the first, his wrinkled forehead drawn up still more tensely than usual. The old cannibal seemed to be tireless. He ran his burning black eyes fore and aft the schooner and noted with satisfaction that no defenders lined her sides. The Samoan seamen had all been killed. His warriors had told him besides that the three white men left alive had been badly wounded.

Kaura chuckled a little to himself. He foresaw an easy victory and he also saw the thin man's yellow-mustached head turning in the head-smoke of the devil-devil house. He could see even more clearly now what the folly of his warriors had been in retreating when they had been so near victory before.

Mulvaney raised his tired head and peered dully at the canoes. The first was within a dozen yards of the schooner's side and advancing swiftly. With a feeble grin the captain puffed his cigar into a glow and reached for a dynamite stick. He touched off the fuse, held it a moment to be sure that it had caught, and threw it with what force he could muster. The stick exploded some two yards to the right of the canoe, nearly swamped her and tore the paddles out of the hands of the natives on that side. It was enough to show that the white man was not dead yet and Kaura turned and yelled excitedly to the canoes behind. They swept on while the chief's canoe was being bailed out and the paddles recovered.

THE captain aimed his next stick better and it went off in the middle of a group of half a dozen of the advancing craft, wrecking three and swamping two more. The water became dotted with bobbing heads. The rest of the canoes stopped abruptly. The men of San Cristoval had no stomach for night attacks at the best of times, and the horror of dynamite there was no facing. Besides, they were still weary from their defeat a few hours before. Kaura cursed and raved and stood up in his canoe, nearly upsetting the frail craft. But still his warriors hesitated.

The captain touched off another fuse and took aim before he let go. It landed near Kaura's canoe again and knocked the old savage off his feet into the water. That was enough for the others. They commenced to paddle slowly back to the shore. Kaura might put all of them to death for refusing to obey, but it was certain the white man would kill them if they continued to attack him.

Kaura was hauled aboard his craft again spluttering and shouting querulously. Probably he had not known such anger since his hot youth. His face was livid under its coat of filth and its scars and wrinkles. His eyes burned savagely. He foamed at the mouth. Captain Mulvaney picked up his rifle and, leaning heavily against the rail with his chest, balanced it as best he could. His first shot went far to the right, as did his second and third. His arm was shaking so much he could not get steady on a mark. But Kaura ordered his paddlers to take him forward. He at least would attack. To stand still meant the white man would get the range. Reluctantly his natives obeyed him.

The captain nearly emptied his magazine before he scored a hit, grazing the arm of a paddler near Kaura. The man dropped his implement with a yell, throwing confusion all through the canoe. It stopped for a moment, giving the captain time to reload. He started shooting again immediately. The first two shots went wide, the next one through the canoe below the water-line, and the fourth drilled Kaura neatly through the brain, just as he was rising to his feet again to curse his retreating warriors in the canoes behind him. He literally rose to meet the shot. Had he remained seated it would never have touched him. As it was he pitched sidewise, with a peculiar twisting movement and went overboard, the current snatching his body away from the canoe.

It was too much. The canoe was turned and hurled toward the shore. The rest of the canoes quickened speed also. The man in whose power it lay to deal out punishment was gone, and already forgotten. Life, and all that life meant, lay ahead for the living. The white men could keep their ship and their woman. The warriors would return to mourn and to remember until their dying day the terrible people who must not be attacked and to whom all things were possible. In ten minutes the river was deserted.

Yet, had the savages only gone forward instead of back, they could have taken the *Kronstadt* then. For after firing the last shot and seeing Kaura fall, Captain Mulvaney slipped sidewise to the deck, over the little pile of dynamite sticks, and fainted. And so the schooner lay, with three unconscious men on her deck and an unconscious girl dangling from a rope overside.

THE beat of the hot sun in his face awoke Jerrold Frazer next morning. His first conscious movement was the opening of his lips to let a groan escape them. Then he opened his eyes and looked up at the blue sky through a slit in the awning and frowned. He winced immediately after, for his whole body was racked with pain and burning as with a thousand tiny fires. He sat up only after several attempts. He rested on one elbow and looked around. The decks were flecked with blood, cluttered with bodies.

Then Frazer twisted his head painfully and saw Mulvaney. The captain was sitting on the deck, his back against the rail, his hands limply lying on the planking beside him. His eyes were open and he was watching Frazer intently.

"Awake?" he whispered, so low that the young man hardly heard him.

Frazer nodded and attempted to get to his feet. He found his knees very shaky and was forced to hang on to the rail. Every movement was exquisite torture. He looked at the captain, bewildered.

"What has happened? I thought I went away to get . . . I've had a horrible dream. Funny. I dreamed I heard a piano playing in the jungle and Miss Tree was playing it. . . . But didn't I go to get her?"

"You brought her back. . . . Come nearer, for I can't speak hardly. . . . And then you passed out. I couldn't pull her aboard and I had to leave her hang. Kaura followed you and I had a fight. Killed him, I think. Must have done, for I see we're all still alive. . . . There's Miss Tree." He pointed feebly to where the line was made fast to the railing by a clove-hitch, the last hitch made with a bight.

Wonderingly Frazer screwed round and looked overside and saw the girl still swinging with the current, her arms in an almost horizontal position. He understood a little. Horror swept him. He passed a shaking hand over his eyes.

"What time did I get back? . . . It seems like a dream. I hardly remember."

"I don't know. It was moonlight and it's full day now. You've slept all the time." The captain sighed wearily and shifted a little to ease his aching back.

Frazer looked down at the girl again and then tried to haul on the rope. The effort forced a cry of pain from his lips and made him realize his own weakness.

"She's been there ever since? In the water all those hours? My God, she must be dead!" He made his way aft and reaching the scuttle leading to the saloon went down the companion and rummaged in the saloon locker. He found what he sought—a half-bottle of schnapps—and removing the cork he drank several mouthfuls of the strong liquor. It made him cough but the effect was immediate. He felt better, stronger, with the false sense of strength that alcohol gives.

The captain eyed the schnapps eagerly and Frazer gave him a drink. The pair of them had to get stamina from somewhere for an effort. The captain was able to totter up after a while and with Frazer seized hold of the rope to which Lucy was suspended. It was a fearful job for two weak men, but they accomplished it at last, and they got the girl on the poop and laid her down gently.

She was still unconscious and after they had drawn her soaked clothes from her they wrapped her in a blanket and laid her on a pillow-softened cane chair.

The captain collapsed immediately after the girl had been rescued, and Frazer helped him to another chair where he lay down and gasped. Then he walked forward to the taffrail. The morning wind was gratefully cool about his naked, burning body. His eyes fell on the whaleboat in the davits midships, griped into the side. He turned to the captain.

"I can't get the ship out of here," he said. "The small boat's the only way, I suppose."

Mulvaney grunted and thought for a while. He was personally incapable, and would be for days yet, for any hard work. Jerrold Frazer was not much better off. Both the second mate and the girl needed immediate attention.

Frazer went down on the main deck to the midship davits. He had often watched the seamen lowering the boat and he had an idea how to go about it. He kicked loose the gripes, so that the boat swung outboard immediately over the water. Then he carefully slacked off the after fall, round the iron cleat on the davit side, for perhaps six feet. That caused the after end of the boat to drop about two feet, and hastily Frazer made fast the fall. He went to the forward fall and slacked that away six feet, bringing the boat level again. Then he made fast and returned to the first fall. In fifteen minutes he had the boat just below the rail, and he returned aft and half carried, half dragged the unconscious girl from the cane chair and placed her awkwardly aboard, with the unconscious second mate, who was still moaning in delirium. The captain staggered to the boat himself and then Frazer went for the water-breakers and the other gear the captain told him he would need.

When all was ready he lowered the boat to the water, taking nearly half an hour to complete the job, and then he slid to her down one of the falls. Mulvaney crawled to the stern sheets and huddled there over the tiller. He gave weary orders about the sail and the mast and directed Frazer how to step it and lash the stays. It was somewhat harder to pull the boat clear of the schooner and into the river toward the sea with a pair of the long oars. But a hundred yards and the wind could be felt. The sail was hoisted. The boat took a slight slant and began to move at an increasing rate through the water. Mulvaney sighed as he thought of his ship.

"There's two white men, Scotchmen, got a trading station near Cape Sydney on the southern coast of this island," he said at last. "I'll follow the coast line round till we reach the place. They'll lend you some Kanakas to sail the boat to Port Moresby or somewhere where there's a doctor. You might even come back for the *Kronstadt*. . . . Hell! I'm sick—sick—sick as hell," he finished with a moan and his yellow mustache touched his breast as he dropped his head in a half-swoon, steering automatically.

But Jerrold Frazer was not aware of him or his words. He was on his knees on the bottom boards holding Lucy Tree's head in the crook of his arm. She had opened her eyes for a few fluttering moments and smiled weakly. Her trembling hand passed over his lips, touching him pathetically as though to be sure he was real.

"I THOUGHT it was a dream," she whispered. "It was so good of you—to come for me. You might have been killed. Why did you risk yourself for me? I've never treated you very well, have I?" She smiled wistfully.

"I couldn't very well leave you, dear," Frazer muttered, squeezing her shaking form close to him. "Not alone in that terrible jungle. It was a matter of self-respect. Purely self-respect, you know."

The girl sighed. Then she roused herself for a moment and leaned up to his unshaven haggard face and against his naked blood-streaked chest.

"Kiss me, Jerrold," she whispered, sobbing, as she had done in the darkness of the great hut. "I won't ever be nasty again."

Frazer understood. Lips met hotly, tremblingly, to fall apart as the girl swooned again and went limp.

"Entirely a matter of self-respect, you know," he mumbled to himself as he gazed down at the white pinched face, beautiful even in collapse.

Everybody's Magazine, January, 1924

The Lark Among Crows

As Regards Fundamentals, a Man's a Man, a Girl a Girl, Even in the Artificial Atmosphere of the Paris Studios. Another Story

By Michael Arlen

Author of "The Broken Nose"

NOW there is a tale that is told in Paris, the city of a million bright lights and more than a million shadows, and it is also told in New York, the city wherein men go up to the sky in elevators by day and placard the sky by night with glad announcements of importance to those of feeble health but sanguine dispositions.

The tale goes something like this:

Of the great French artist Duhamel, whose paintings fetch many thousands of francs, it is told how one afternoon he was disturbed at his work by a faint knock at the street door of his studio in the Rue Clarent.

Now Duhamel was a very tall and heavily bearded man, with a nose eminently of the Roman sort. Perhaps it was the patriarchal effect of the auburn beard, or perhaps it was the unbridled mass of graying auburn hair that fell untidily over his neck, or perhaps it was both together with the addition of his soul, but he commonly looked at least fifteen years older than his age, which was thirty-eight. We have mentioned the soul of the great artist, Duhamel, but of it we know nothing, except that it must have been a curious place, for not even his great success by the age of thirty-eight seemed to have softened his naturally sardonic temper. It was not, you understand, for amiability that Duhamel had a reputation.

He was, at that moment, at work on the broad outlines of a sketch for an immense mural decoration, which had lately been commissioned by an American millionaire, to astound other millionaires who would visit him at his château in Provence. But, besides being a millionaire, which is a form of indoor diversion that keeps only too many millionaires too busy to be anything else, Mr. Vandermark was a great friend of Duhamel's; and between them was a great joke, which came to take shape as a bet.

"It isn't," said Mr. Vandermark, "that you don't like women, Duhamel. But it is that you like your beard. You are proud of your beard, though the Lord only knows why, and He won't tell. Now no woman alive would marry a man with a beard like that. I have acquired inside information as to the workings of what are called minds in women, and I may tell you that they do not like marrying a man disguised as a forest. They prefer their forests separate.

"And you know it, so that to be safe from the discordant pleasures of matrimony you have gone to the length of desecrating a possibly pleasing exterior with the sweepings of all the more inferior barbers' shops in Paris and New York. Now I will bet you one hundred thousand francs, Duhamel, that the first woman you really want to marry will, as a preliminary condition of acceptance, prescribe a sharp razor, an ax, or some dynamite, to clean away the unnecessary matter from what she, with the optimism peculiar to a woman in love, will think to be your face."

"Vandermark," said Duhamel, "you are a fool."

"Not to-day," said Mr. Vandermark. "Take the bet, then! On!"

"No time limit?"

"Until death do us part," said Mr. Vandermark.

"Which is about the only thing that ever will part me from my beard," growled Duhamel. And thus the bet was made.

MEANWHILE that faint knock is still hanging in the silent air of the studio in the Rue Clarent. It was repeated, faintly enough; but perhaps it was not quite so faint, for this time Duhamel spoke a wicked word into his beard and looked murderously into the dimness by the door. And then, because Providence is in all things, to the confusion of men and women, the great brown-bearded man in soiled white smock strode to the door and flung it open.

"Well?" snarled Duhamel.

"It is Marie Louise Fontanas who would see Monsieur Duhamel, the artist."

"And then?" snarled Duhamel.

"And then," said she who was called Marie Louise Fontanas, in the low, steady voice of one who knows that all things are vain: "And then she desires that she should be asked within, for her coat is not the thickest in the world and January is not noticeably the warmest of the months."

"Come in, girl," growled Duhamel.

Then came swiftly into the studio Marie Louise Fontanas, tall and dark and slim. Yes, she was tall, as girls go, and she was as slim as a tulip, and her hair under her bright red toque was as black as the blackest thing in the world, and blacker even than that where it coiled about her dead-white cheeks; and out of the eyes of Marie Louise Fontanas looked two restless black devils, very serious, very young.

Duhamel closed the door, and he strode to where she stood very absently in the center of the great, dim, untidy studio. He looked down at her in enormous displeasure.

"You are a model," he said. "You are hungry. You want money. Here it is. Go." And from the pocket of his soiled smock he took out a crumpled handful of notes of low denomination and septic appearance, and held them out to her.

"I am a model," she said, and her voice was as calm as a great lady's whose feet were tired of treading on Aubusson carpets. "But I am not hungry. I am, as a matter of fact, a very small eater. As to money, naturally I want money. To have money is always useful. You are very kind, Monsieur Duhamel." And Marie Louise Fontanas took the money from the large, dirty hand of Duhamel, and she put it into a small red handbag, which may not properly be called a vanity bag, for it had long since lost its vanity.

"I was unaware," growled Duhamel, "that it was my function in life to be an imbecile. With your permission, mademoiselle, I will remedy the matter." And he strode to the door.

"Wait!" cried the girl, and there was that in her cry that made him turn and look back; but as she came swiftly across the floor toward him, her dark eyes poignant with appeal, he said sharply:

"No, girl! I am busy. You are going to tell me your life history; I can see in your eyes the desire to tell me your life history. Many women have told me their life histories; it is a bad habit women have, and they have all bored me to death——"

"Never have I bored a man!" said Marie Louise Fontanas; and she said it without pride; she said it as a fact.

"*I*, however, am not being notably entertained," remarked he of the sardonic eyes, and turned again toward the door, to dismiss her. But with a spring she had caught the lapel of his smock.

Now women did not usually treat Duhamel thus. He was, you understand, surprised. He glared at her.

"Listen to me!" said Marie Louise Fontanas, as intensely as a woman in a wilderness who has not spoken for many days. "I have told you my name. My age is twenty-four. My father was Mexican, my mother a Breton. They are dead many years. I am a model. I do not mind being a model, it is the men I mind. Look at me, Monsieur Duhamel, and you will see that I am beautiful. It has been told to me that I am very beautiful, but of course people exaggerate. But, as a model, I am as a lark among crows. I may not do my work and earn my living without my employers' making love to me. I do not like that, please, Monsieur Duhamel. I am untouchable, you understand—I, Marie Louise Fontanas. And so I have come to you, because you are spoken of as one who is not forever falling in love or committing such idiocies of the idle and mediocre. I have come to you, Monsieur Duhamel."

And the bearded, eagle face of the artist broke into a sudden boyish smile.

"I have noticed it," he said. "And what the devil do you think *I* can do with you?"

"I am beautiful, and——"

"How you repeat yourself!" grinned Duhamel.

"But it is important, in a model!" cried the girl.

"Pah!" snapped Duhamel. "There are many beautiful women in the world. And there are many photographers to deal with them. But I, Marie Louise Fontanas, am an artist. I do not look for beauty. I look for all things, girl."

"And I," whispered the girl, "am all things. Look at me, Duhamel."

And he did as he was told—that arrogant Duhamel! With one hand he raised the chin of the lovely white face, and he looked into the large black eyes; and now the two restless black devils were gone from her eyes, they were lakes of shining dark light, and they were as impersonal as the stars.

"My God!" growled Duhamel. "You are older than twenty-four, girl, with those eyes!"

"I think," murmured Marie Louise Fontanas into his searching face, "that I am as old as love. And that is why, perhaps, love bores me—as it is said to bore you, Duhamel, which is why I am here. I am tired of being a lark among crows, Duhamel."

"Go away," snapped Duhamel, but still he looked into her face, which was as impassive as a mask in the fingers of a connoisseur. "Come back again when you like. I may paint you. I may not. But I find you agreeable, and I will not let you starve. But don't talk too much. I am very busy these days. Go away, now."

NOW let time perish.

Then, it is told in the tale how the month of May smote Paris to the heart with spring sunlight and spring shadow, bright nights and scented flowers and all the other fripperies of a month that knows its business, which business is primarily to enliven the hearts of men and even more primarily to gladden the hearts of women. And it is also told how, one evening in the youth of that month, the great artist Duhamel climbed down from the head of the ladder, from which he was dealing masterfully with the final details of the mural decoration for Mr. Vandermark, and how he approached the slim dark figure that lay coiled on a divan in the corner, surrounded by tea and cakes and absent-mindedness.

"It is," growled Duhamel, "a beautiful evening."

And he towered above the coiled dark figure with the white face, and his frowning eyes seemed to examine her thoughtfully, as though she were an ornament whose excellency was still a matter for considerable doubt.

"It is," growled Duhamel, "a beautiful evening."

"Hitherto," said Marie Louise Fontanas, "I had not remarked in you an abundance of small-talk, nor had I suspected that, when it came, it would be so extremely small. As to the evening, I agree with you."

"Would you like," asked Duhamel, "to dine with me to-night?"

Then Marie Louise Fontanas turned up her face to the bearded face of Duhamel and examined it gravely; for, you understand, though she had the freedom of the studio as regards dropping in at any hour of the afternoon, not ever before had Duhamel invited her to dinner—or to anything! She came and went as she listed; she read books, coiled like a Byzantine ornament on that divan; he talked to her or he did not talk to her; sometimes he asked her if she needed any money and sometimes she said she did, and he had made two sketches of her head, which he had instantly presented to the waste-paper basket with remarks organic to the occasion.

Wherefore, because of this and because of that, a crinkle of perplexity invaded the dead-white brow of Marie Louise Fontanas as she looked up at Duhamel. And he smiled that sudden boyish smile of his.

"Of course," said Marie Louise Fontanas, "it would be very pleasant to dine with you to-night. But not at Larue, nor at Arménonville, nor yet at Foyot, the Madrid, or the Café de Paris——"

"Is it I," asked Duhamel, "who am taking you out to dinner, at enormous expense to myself and a good deal of inconvenience to the friends I had already promised to dine with, or is it you taking me out to dinner? Wherefore, girl, you will do as you are told. Come." And she came, and they went.

NOW there is a hill in Paris, renowned through all the world because of the versatile gaieties and glittering follies that are nightly committed there. The hill is called Montmartre, though clerical gentlemen have called it warmer names than that.

But the crown of the hill rises above the shining squares and boulevards of Montmartre, and on the crown of the hill, which is called the Butte, there arise to the sky, like white jewels dropped from the tiara of a goddess, the domes and towers and cupolas of the white church of Sacré Cœur; and over against the church there lies, flat on top of the hill, a little square, and in the square is a little restaurant, and in the little restaurant, on a night in May, were a great bearded man and a slim girl with hair as black as the blackest thing in the world.

Once outside the restaurant is a little garden, overhanging the panorama of Paris from the Mont Valérien to the grim old Lion du Belfort, with the thin riband of the Seine shining like a rapier through it all.

In the garden sat Duhamel, after dinner, experimenting successfully with a Benedictine, while Marie Louise Fontanas sipped black coffee, with absent eyes. They stared over the million lights of Paris, those eyes. Duhamel smoked, and was silent.

"Paris!" whispered Marie Louise Fontanas. "It is a beautiful name for a beautiful thing—Paris!"

"I," said Duhamel to his beard and cigar, "know why it is called Paris, and I will tell you, for you are a good girl, as girls go, and it is a spring evening.

"In the old days," said Duhamel, "there was a great prince in the land, and he builded himself a great and fair city, thinking that the enormous expense and general inconvenience were worth while because of the respect that would naturally be paid to his monumental memory by his children and children's children. It was the most beautiful city in the world, and must have adequate nomenclature.

"That is what, at the very next board-meeting, he told his dukes, barons, knights and counselors; and he was extremely displeased when an ancient gentleman, beside whose beard mine would seem but as the solitary hair on a bald man's crown, arose and said that, as a matter of fact, it was not the most beautiful city in the world. From further conversation and inquiry it appeared that, without a shadow of doubt, the most beautiful city in the world was the extremely ancient city of Is in Brittany. Wherefore the prince, persuaded that it would be discourteous in him to insist that his own city was the most beautiful in the world, called it Paris, which is Par-Is, which of course means equal-to-Is; and I am very glad, girl, that the tale is over, for something else is very much on my mind. And it has been very much on my mind for some weeks past. The fact is, Marie Louise Fontanas, that I love you."

"No, no!" whispered the girl, and her large dark eyes spilled themselves wretchedly over the queerly pleading face of Duhamel that leant across the table.

"But it is so, girl! I love you. I, Duhamel the artist, say so, and I am not aware of any occasion in my life when I have wantonly spoken a lie. Girl, will you marry me? I, Duhamel, am asking you."

"No, no!" cried the girl with infinite misery, so that he stared with enormous wonder at her quivering profile, as white as the white of a camellia against the nigh

"You see," pleaded Duhamel, he who had never pleaded before, "you see, my very dear, I am not practised in love-making, I do not know how it is done. I know only that I love you, and that when you come into my studio I want you to stay there forever, there, in my life, like a flower that is so beautiful that it will never die——"

"Ah, but it will!" sighed the profile. "All flowers die, Duhamel. Even the most beautiful. They die. That is called 'life'!"

"But, my very dear, you speak with inaccurate judgment! For even though a flower must die, is a flower less beautiful because it must die? Oh, Marie Louise Fontanas, your eyes are thieves, that have stolen the heart of an arrogant man, and your hair is black silver, and your face—but I do not know what your face is like, for I can never look at it, I love you so."

"OH, DUHAMEL!" she whispered, wretchedly. "I came to you so that I would be your friend and so that you would be my friend—I, who was utterly friendless, because I could call no man my friend for the reason that every man would be my husband or my lover——"

"Hussy!" growled Duhamel. "It is with such talk of being bored with men who made love to you that you enticed me to let you wander about my life. I, who have always kept women at a distance, was beguiled by your vaunted indifference to men! And now, what am I?"

. And then she laughed at him, and her laughter was like a silver hammer on his taut nerves, so that he banged the table with his fist and the glass of Benedictine was overturned.

"There!" laughed Marie Louise Fontanas. "Your Benedictine is spilled!"

"Pah!" snarled Duhamel. "My life is ruined!"

"Oh, beloved, I am sure you exaggerate!"

And then the hand of Duhamel stretched swiftly across the little table and very tightly grasped her wrist.

"What was that word?" he snapped.

And she stared at him, frightened.

"It slipped my tongue," she faltered.

"Marie Louise Fontanas, what was that word?"

And his fingers almost crushed the little bones that went to make her wrist.

" 'Beloved,' " she whispered.

"Good!" said Duhamel. "It is understood, then, that you will marry me. François, another Benedictine!"

Then up jumped Marie Louise Fontanas, like a dark angel of the night.

"What!" she cried to the stars. "I marry a man with a beard like that!"

"Damn my beard!" growled Duhamel.

"That is just what I want you to do! Or rather," coldly added Marie Louise Fontanas, "you ought to blast it away with dynamite."

The eyes above the beard towered above her closely.

"And then, girl, you will marry me?"

Silence in the little garden overhanging the lights of Paris.

"I do not promise," she said firmly. "I have not yet said I loved you, Duhamel."

"You have said 'beloved'!"

"Ah, that was a passing moment of forgetfulness! I had forgotten your beard."

"Oh, the devil!" stormed Duhamel.

"A beard," said Marie Louise Fontanas, "is made of hair, and hair tickles."

"Pah! What is a tickle to my love! And what is a tickle to my reputation! My beard is me, the artist Duhamel. Without my beard, what will I be! Perhaps I have a weak chin underneath. Perhaps I have a receding chin. I have forgotten what my chin is like, and then you talk of my destroying my beard!"

And Marie Louise Fontanas, she of the hair that shone like black silver, looked up at the stars, and her eyes were as impersonal as the stars.

"You need not," said she indifferently, "unless you want to." And her voice was cold as a cypress grove on a spring night.

"And if I do," whispered Duhamel into her ear, "you will marry me?"

Very steadily she faced him, unsmiling.

"I promise nothing," her lips just moved to say. And she added curiously: "And you will be glad of that."

And his bearded face broke into a boyish smile, and like a boy in love he whispered, "Beloved!" For there is that in all decent men, even in artists of international reputation, which is as undying as death, and its name is Youth.

LET time perish—but only a little, for lo! this is but the night after that on which a glass of Benedictine was spilled in the little garden overhanging the lights of Paris.

In the great drawing-room of Mr. Vandermark's house, which is where the Avenue Hoche descends magnificently to the gates of the Parc Monceau, were three people. On that vast expanse of parquet floor, among the golden chairs and ancient velvets, against the somber tapestries and curious mirrors of the polite days of Louis XIV, they looked like figures drawn on an ancient paper fan of quality. There were Mr. Vandermark, his wife, and his daughter. They were dressed in those clothes which, all the world over, indicate to the meanest observer the near approach of *hors d'œuvres* and other elegant distractions. The cocktails had already approached; and four long-stemmed glasses stood at attention on a tray of black-and-gold lacquer, four baubles in vermilion that politely but insistently invited your attention. Anyway, they invited Mr. Vandermark's attention.

"Why in blazes," Mr. Vandermark was asking, "doesn't the man come?"

"Well," said Mrs. Vandermark mildly, "from what I have heard of him, I gather that it was an unheard-of concession in him to say he would come at all. Oh, dear! What *am* I going to talk to him about!"

"I," said Mr. Vandermark, "will do the talking. As for his coming to-night, this dinner is to celebrate the *finis* of that wall-piece he's been doing for me. Gee, but that man can paint! I told him it was only a family party—and I guess it is!" And Mr. Vandermark grinned impishly. But his daughter neither smiled nor spoke.

"Well," sighed Mrs. Vandermark, "it certainly is a mercy that Louisa speaks French so that you wouldn't know the difference."

The great double doors were opened, and entered Mr. Vandermark's English butler.

"Mr. Duhamel," announced the butler.

"Great guns!" said Mr. Vandermark. "*And* with knobs on it!"

A tall man stood in the doorway, a man with an eagle nose and a chin that would be inclined to meet danger dangerously. A very distinguished and elegant man—with a sardonic smile in his frowning eyes.

Entered Duhamel, borne magnificently across the parquet floor on the amazed silence of his host.

And then he stopped—for there, by the side of thick little Vandermark, stood Marie Louise Fontanas! No, it was not Marie Louise Fontanas, it was a young lady of fashion in a dress of silver tissue, which was a marvel to behold; and a gardenia was alight on the wing of her sleek, black hair, that hair which was like black silver.

"So!" said Duhamel, and he did not move, but stared with the eyes of a stone image into the face of her who had been Marie Louise Fontanas.

Mr. Vandermark could scarcely contain himself.

"My daughter, Duhamel— And you've lost your bet!"

"Yes," growled Duhamel, and still he did not move; but the lips of "Marie Louise Fontanas" moved, just a little, ever so little. They shaped a word.

"Yes," said Duhamel. "I have lost my bet, Vandermark. But I have won your daughter."

For the word the lips had shaped was the word "beloved."

Eight Short Stories in February

Mine By Ethel Watts Mumford
What saves a man when disaster comes?

The Dancer of Paris By Michael Arlen
Another romance by the author of "The Broken Nose"

Simpson By Albert Richard Wetjen
It sometimes takes odd things to bring the best out of a man

Truthful James By William Upson
A new author says it with humor

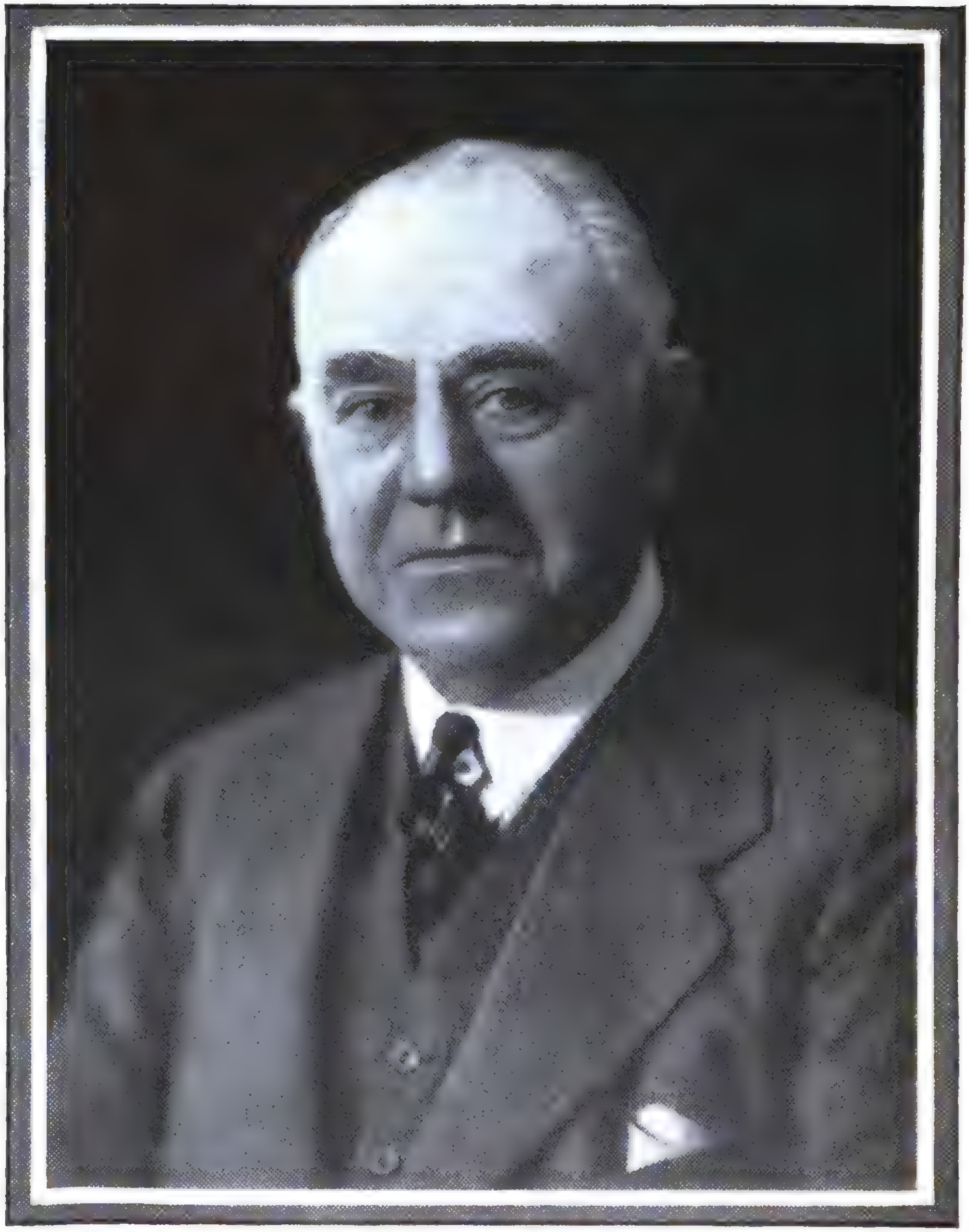
A Day's Work By Mary Henke
A bright spot among the lonely ones of a great city

The Golden Grove By Talbert Josselyn
When a man has to fight for his dream

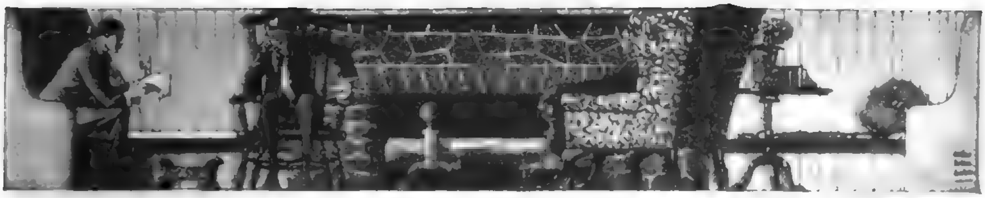
For Sake of a Lady By Sam Carson
The first of several notable race-track tales

Counterfeit Beauty By Arthur B. Reeve
Craig Kennedy finds something new in the underworld

February *EVERYBODY'S*—Out January 15



E. Phillips Oppenheim, author of "The Wrath to Come," the startling story of a new world, which begins in February. He was eighteen years old when his first story was published and his first novel appeared when he was twenty. He doesn't know why he began writing unless it was something he simply couldn't help. Writing, plunging into the untrodden world of romance, has never lost its fascination for him, and he has seventy-two books to his credit. He was married in this country and has a daughter, grown now.



Everybody's Chimney Corner

Where Reader, Author and Editor Gather to Talk Things Over

Some EVERYBODY'S Features for 1924

AN IMPORTANT feature of EVERYBODY'S 1924 program is "The Wrath to Come," a novel by E. Phillips Oppenheim which begins next month. Of his work the *Independent* once said:

> "We do not stop to inquire into the measure of his art any more than we inquire into that of Alexandre Dumas; we only realize that here is a benefactor of tired men and women seeking relaxation. He is an entertainer, pure and simple."

This last assertion seemed to be true up to 1914. Then came the Great War and with it the revelation that Mr. Oppenheim was not only an entertainer but a prophet as well. Up to this time the Oppenheim novel of intrigue and diplomatic wiles was held to be very entertaining reading matter, but rather fantastic and far-fetched. The war taught the public that the peace of the world might be shattered as the result of some petty intrigue. In fact, Oppenheim in one of his very entertaining but fantastic (?) novels had predicted this very thing which came to pass.

OPPENHEIM makes a prediction in "The Wrath to Come." He projects himself thirty years into the future. Peace reigns throughout the world; armies and fleets have been reduced to minimum size; everything outwardly is working nicely under international agreements. Everything is different, everything is changed, except—human nature. It is this discord in the orchestra that makes the story—and it's a startling one.

ANOTHER big feature for 1924 is a new novel by Honoré Willsie, author of "Godless Valley" and "The Lariat," which have appeared serially in EVERYBODY'S. The new story is a singularly gripping narrative of a young woman's fight for life—and something more—in the pioneer days of the far West. And there will be another good old-fashioned pirate story—one just as absorbing as "The Blood Ship" which EVERYBODY'S published some time ago. It will be by Joseph Husband. Also there is a possibility of another E. Phillips Oppenheim novel if he finishes it in time. There will be short stories and novelettes during the year by all of the authors with whose work EVERYBODY'S readers have become familiar and some new ones. A few are:

RAFAEL SABATINI
STEPHEN FRENCH WHITMAN
SAM CARSON
ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN
JONATHAN BROOKS
ETHEL WATTS MUMFORD
REGINALD WRIGHT KAUFFMAN
S. CARLETON
KATHRENE AND ROBERT PINKERTON
HUGH RANDOLPH
ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE
GEORGE F. WORTS
T. S. STRIBLING
ARTEMUS CALLOWAY
FRANK HELLER
RICHARD CONNELL
LUCIAN CARY
ELLIS PARKER BUTLER
STANLEY OLMSTED
MICHAEL ARLEN
PROSPER BURANELLI
DALE COLLINS
JOHN FARRAR
F. H. HICKS
EDWINA LEVIN MACDONALD
ARTHUR B. REEVE
WALTON HALL SMITH
FRANCES R. STERRETT
HAROLD TITUS
HUGH WALPOLE
MARGERY WILLIAMS
NELIA GARDNER WHITE

This Month's Contributors

AMONG this month's contributors is Austin Hall, author of "Unto the Children" (page 43). The sketch Mr. Hall writes of himself is just as interesting as the fiction story which appears earlier in the book, and for that reason the Chimney Corner circle, we are sure, will be glad to give him ample time to be heard.

I was born in the Santa Cruz Mountains [he begins], in the shade of the redwoods, and lived there until I was ten years old. Then I was taken back to Ohio, attended school in Cleveland and graduated from Lincoln High School. Then I went to Ohio State University; but kicked over the traces at the end of my freshman year and came out to attend the University of California. That year I had the honor of living with Jack London's Sea Wolf, the real man, for some months. When I got out of the University I picked out a girl that I liked and started after her. I chased her into the Sierra Nevada Mountains and got her in the face of terrible odds and much opposition. And she's accusing me yet. But just the same we sat under a pine tree and sang life's sweetest story; and while we were doing it I confided to her, between notes, that it was my ambition to become a writer. And that ambition is going to be the theme of this story.

Elizabeth Van Deusen is one of those rare persons who can find their way around Brooklyn. And her story (page 89) proves how well she knows the people in it.

YOU see, I always wanted to become a writer. And of the writers I have found that there are just two kinds—the writahs and the writers.

The writahs! God bless them! They wear their hair long or short, depending on whether they are male or female, and they are always the clawss, you know, and distinctly above the common hurd. But unfortunately they never sell anything. And I got to thinking that if I ever entered the game I would be only adding another queer nut to the crowd. Just the same, I started a story while in college and actually wrote half of it. Then for years it lay in a trunk, until one day, when I was out in the desert trying to outstay Uncle Sam's three-year limit without starving to death, the good wife—yes, I've got her yet—dug it up. In a careless moment she showed it to an oil-well driller and a cowboy and they promptly proclaimed that, unless I finished the story, they would hang me to a sagebush. So what could I do? I finished the story, of course; and they carried it to town and had it typewritten. Then we held a consultation and decided to send it to an all-fiction weekly. And in three weeks there came a letter from the editor. Ye gods! He had bought it! (Climax number one.) I was a genius and didn't know it! I simply had to get busy. So I wrote another—and sold it! Easy, wasn't it?

WELL, it wasn't. You see the wife had to get the measles—no, I'm not blaming her—and right on top of it the little fellow picked up pneumonia. And they had to do it right when we were in an expensive house and couldn't afford it! I wrote a story—that was just what it was—the product of sleeplessness, nursing, worry, housekeeping and nightmare—and it was just that! You see I had to have the money. I wrote several in the intervals between capsules and quinine and sent them off. The wife was getting well by this time and the little fellow was playing on the doorstep. Why worry! All I had to do was to wait for the checks. I tell you that there is nothing like being a genius! And just then, here came the mail man—the poor fellow was burdened with envelopes—big ones—great big ones—monsters! He began counting: "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine!"

"Any more?" I asked.

"No, that's all."

THAT was enough. Every last manuscript that I had sent out had been rejected.

And here I was with the rent due, busted, and a stranger in a strange land. Worse than that—I was an author and not supposed to work. It was a little Main Street town and I could not have had a job if I wanted it. Who ever heard of an author doing hard work! We held a council of war—the wife and I. Would we give up or not? It was the night before battle—a dark moment when lives were in balance. We were generals holding a last conference against the greatest foe of the worthy—hard luck. I guess I'll have to pass it to the wife; because she never whimpered for an instant.

"Give up!" she said. "Well, I guess not! We're not dead yet. Those editors! I'd just like to get a hold of their necks! But cheer up, Dolly, you're the greatest writer of them all. You'll show them yet."

NOW what are you going to do with a wife like that? I'm thinking you'd do just what I did—get busy! I wanted a job and I started to get it. I had to take anything that came my way. In two hours I found a man who had a job shoveling gravel, but who was quitting for something that would last.

"Would you shovel gravel for two-fifty a day?" he asked.

"Would I shovel gravel?" I answered. "Say, brother! I'd hate to tell you what I'd do for two-fifty."

You see all I had was thirteen cents. Well, the job lasted three days; and then I received the greatest and most famous check of my whole life. Seven-fifty!

THE next day I started out after more work and again I had to take what I could get.

We had been living in the most fashionable part of town and the rent was due. We had no furniture and no money. I wanted a job where I could work half-days, if I could, and one where I could get a house. And I got it. My plan was to work half a day and write the other. That afternoon I ran across an old farmer who had some wood to cut and who said that he would pay me a dollar a tier for cutting it. Also he had a house for me to live in. When I looked at that house I felt like a criminal. The farmer almost balked when it came to advancing money for groceries; he looked me over.

"Wal," he said cautiously, "if I thought you was wuthy and God-fearin' I might. But I dunno. But mebbe"—looking me over dubiously—"mebbe I might risk three dollars an' fifty cents' wuth."

THE next thing was the furniture. I went to the man who had given me his gravel job and he took me to a friend who had some stored away.

It was agreed that for fifteen dollars, payable in thirty days, I was to have an old bed, some springs, a tick with nothing in it, an old stove, a table and three chairs. The farmer came to town to buy the groceries and hauled me out. Just at sundown we moved into our new home. I shall never forget that evening. It was winter, but it was in California and the air was lovely. We went up on the hillside under the oaks and gathered dry leaves for the tick. Then Mrs. Hall made supper and we went to bed. The wife took it as a lark.

"Isn't this lovely!" she said. "It sure beats the dickens out of something that is costing a hundred a month."

But it wasn't as nice as she thought. About twelve o'clock I was awakened by a tip, tip, tippity tip, tippity tip, on the roof. Raining! At first it was just like that—nice and drowsy, just the right music to sleep on. Then I heard something else. Thump! Like something wet striking a soft surface. I felt a slight tap on the bed covers. Simultaneously the storm hit and it began raining as though it meant business. By the time I had the lamp lit, it was coming down in torrents. And the roof was leaking like a sieve.

THERE was nothing to do but hunt up a spot where it was not so bad and move the bed under it. But that spot did not exist. That roof was a hundred years old if it was a day.

Next morning the farmer came down and told me the roof leaked! And I fixed it. The sun came out and the world was rosy again.

In three weeks I had another story out and this time it sold. When I figured up with my farmer friend, I had cut just enough wood to pay my grocery bill and have ten cents left. I've got that ten-cent piece yet. Then I beat it to a land where I had an anchor. Since then I have always hung with some sort of business or investment to tide us over in case of adversity. You see, you can never trust these editors; they're as bad as the authors. What do I do now? Why, I write, of course. We have a little bungalow, and two children, and lawns and chickens, and flowers and an automobile and a phonograph. We just live; and we're worth a hundred million, because we get all there is out of every second of life. The wife still swears that I am the greatest writer that ever lived—greater even than Cobb, mind you—and I believe her.

ELIZABETH VAN DEUSEN contributes a very delightful story, "Half a Man" (page 89). Of herself she writes:

To be asked to desert fiction long enough to write facts, even home facts, seems a rather cruel request to make of a new story-writer. I don't really mind telling my age—many years ago a little girl of eight years came to live in Brooklyn. One day while out walking with her Aunt Sue, in New York, they saw a line of all sorts of people filing in—then out—of a private house. Aunt Sue and the little girl went in; and there in his narrow home, with candles burning and sword gleaming, lay the body of General Sherman. If I were that small girl, how old would I be now?

PERHAPS it is because I have so much Dutch ancestry, pre-Revolutionary, New York State variety, that I possess few active dislikes. I like

Austin Hall ("Unto the Children," page 43) was born in the shade of the redwoods; and in his drama of the forest you catch its actual breath.

to do my own plain thinking, and must admit I don't care for people who try to stampede me—or the crowd—mentally, and I don't like an appeal made to the emotions that should be made to "what I am pleased to call my mind." Among my numerous likes I will mention three key ones—flowers, New York and succotash. I delight in a good show. I know why Tammany wins every other election in New York. And I can, or could, go from Little Clove Road to Nolan's Lane without once asking directions.

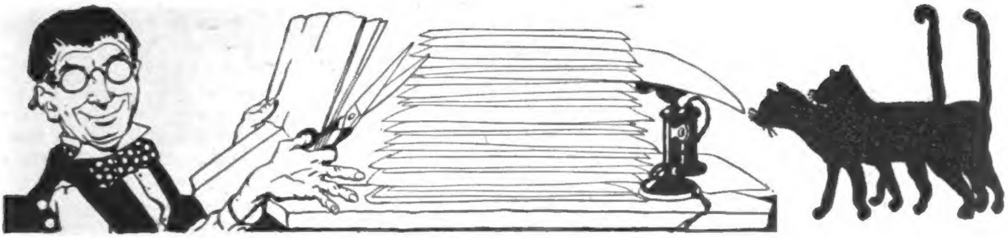
FOR many years I lived in the heart of downtown Brooklyn, and I know department-store life from behind the counter. If you number any interested Brooklynites among your readers, it may interest them to know that if fiction-writing fails me I can again make cake in the Van Deusen pans. (I was never guilty of that molasses fruit-cake manipulation.) I like to think that I inherit my modest creative ability from my inventive father. I think I may assume the position of one of the charter members of the extremely new school of writers that I hope to see multiply, and that I call "The Hopelessly Romantic Realists."

For many years I longed for a country home. After a while, through the agency of such simple things as death and war, I found myself here in Irving's country living with my mother in a most cheerful small house on the Hebbard School grounds. Mrs. Hebbard is my cousin, and lends her kindly sympathy when the woodchucks and rabbits bring my gardening operations to an untimely end.

"THE JUNGLE-THING" (page 103) is something you will read and with which you may quarrel, but you will find it interesting. Of himself, the author, Eugene Cunningham, says:

> As for personalia, I'm going to confess here and now that it's mighty hard to haul out anything like a brief, connected description from the jumble of "this and that" which life has been for me. Of course I'm a Southerner, of Scotch-English ancestry and no more ancient vintage than the "nineties." In my skirted years the folks, having traipsed all over the Southern states, settled finally in Texas. I studied a little in the public schools, and heaps and heaps in quiet corners of libraries. Then, ten years ago, I slipped away to be a bold sailor man—Asiatic station, Pacific coast; convoy duty out of New York during the war. Writing all the time, selling—well, you know the proposition. Always bedeviled by that line of Kipling: "How can you *do* anything until you have seen everything—or as much as you can?" So—Central America from Costa Rica to Guatemala, horseback and afoot, seemed the answer after the war.
>
> AT PRESENT and from now on time without end amen, San Francisco is my home town. Own several burning ambitions, most of which are merely variants of the first: to make a second-hand Underwood pay bills for the two of us; to own a real red-brick house; to (*a*) keep an Airedale and (*b*) feed him myself; to wander for a year or so in that "Mysterious Peten" of which I spoke somewhat through Gato Viejo's face, then come flying home to San Francisco to write.

Eugene Cunningham gathered the material for his story ("The Jungle-Thing," page 103) on extensive travels through Central America, horseback and afoot.



Prose *and* Worse, *by* Gridley Adams

DO YOU BELIEVE IN SIGNS?

In Hartford, Conn.: "*Cane Seat Chairs Recaned by Kane the caner.*"
In Baltimore: "*Whitewashing done here in all colors.*"
In Sturgis, Mich.: "*Please occupy the seats as much as possible.*"
In Chicago café: "*No meals exchanged.*"
In Boston Public Library: "*Only low conversation permitted here.*"
In Oregon, Ill., greenhouse: "*The earth given away with the plants.*"
In Philadelphia: "*Dr. Lawyer, Dentist; S. M. Huskey, Throat Specialist; L. Gritti, Dealer in Sand & Gravel; K. M. Ice, Cold Storage.*" (G. F. C.)
In Buffalo: "*Two pants with every suit.*" (DR. F. L. W.)
On program of Fairmont, W. Va., Y. M. C. A. athletic meet: "*Wrestling Match, Downe and Outt.*" (MRS. P. C. K.)
In Philadelphia *North American: "Strictly Fresh Eggs. Big Meaty Beauties.*" (W. B. A.)
In Trenton *Times: "Auto Hit By Train Is Still Unconscious.*"
In Glasgow, Scotland: "*Washington Soda Fountain, Betti & Lazarini, Props.*" Also "*Caledonian Café, Rizieri Bertuccelli, Prop.*" (There's fine old American names for you.) (A. M. S., GLASGOW)
In St. Petersburg, Fla., directory: "*Square Deal Transfer Co., C. R. Crook, Mgr.*"

(Crum's Ridge Items)

New tomatoes will be the next thing on the edible list. Oh how we crave them.

Yes, they are better than old ones, particularly when they are thrown at you.

(Fort Dodge Messenger)

"SKELETONS START MURDER PROBE" (O. H. H.)

***Now* we'll find *out* something.**

(Illinois weekly)

Ralph Dilley and Irene Pickle were married in Decatur last week.

Two of the "57" varieties.

(Chariton, Iowa, Leader)

Miss Ima Fluke spent a few days last week with her aunt.

There's candor for you.

(Adv. of Chicago Dept. Store)

"Every piece of furniture reduced for this sale."

Chipped here and there, probably.

(Eastford Items)

Mr. Editor:—

Fairly good hay weather is here and many are taking advantage of same. Your correspondent's haying is progressing.

Farmers are short of hay. Help scarce and presume majority of hay will be saved but a great deal will be spoiled.

This is the best week of haying seen.

This week has been an ideal week for haymakers. Expect different weather Thursday and Friday.

Lots of farmers are plodding away with their haying all alone, for help is scarce and not many think well of hard work nowadays.

Making news while the hay shines.

(Garrett, Ind., Clipper)

While Mrs. Joseph Rotherberger was absent from home, a thief entered the house and took her pocketbook. Luckily there was no money in it at the time.

"'Twas the night before pay-day, and all through the house——"

(Prescott, Ariz., Courier)

Tuesday night there was a row in colored society circles. Mrs. Mackey received a slight cut in the fracas.

Boy, bring me those anatomical charts, quick.

Copyright, 1923, *by Gridley Adams*

(*Falmouth, Ky., Items*)

After a downpour of April showers for forty-eight hours, the clouds have rolled away and the sun is brightly shining this beautiful Sabbath morning upon the just and the unjust. We should never complain and curse the April showers, for they are the harbingers of many flowers—June roses, June brides and the pooled tobacco plants. Be happy these beautiful Lord's days. Go to Sunday-school and church, for on the morrow your souls may be called away to God's Beulah lands. This lovely day I am enjoying down on the poultry farm of my friends, J. Frank Doan and the good farm wife. There is music in the air, baby chicks chirping, mother hens cackling, roosters crowing, the proud old turkey gobbler all dressed up in his new spring feathers strutting about gobbling as though he were chief of all. The hum of the separator's sweet music, all combined, sure is like unto heaven on earth.

We should be a happy people, showered as we are with so many of God's blessings. Many more blessings are yours if you prepare for them. To plot out an orchard space, break the soil and cultivate, scatter seeds (of kindness) use the disk, then your soil will be O. K. for transplanting fruit trees, which I hope to take your order for this fall's delivery. After a three months' siege of sickness I hope to get in the field soon, and hope to visit every home in my county of Pendleton and adjoining counties. Please hold your fall order for me. Your help I need and will appreciate. I shall represent the Highland Nursery, Cloverport, Ky. Our prices will suit you.

C. F. Pettit.

And the choir will now sing that old, sweet melody entitled, "The old, gray mare she ain't what she used to be." (No, and she never was.)

(*Adv. of Rothschild's Dept. Store, Chicago*)

Haircutting, 20c
Rothschild's, Tenth Floor
Manicuring, 25c
Third Floor
2 Deliveries a Day. (H. H. B.)

Why not add: Mail orders promptly filled?

(*Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Times*)

"One of the bolts struck one of the finest of this group of forest monarchs and shattered it so badly that its place on the hillside will know it no more forever."

And its return would be quite a surprise to many.

(*Providence Bulletin*)

"The bride was attired in a bridal gown of white satin, trimmed with ice."

No wonder some of them get cold feet.

(*Chicago Tribune*)

Two hours before, Pavell had taken part in a card game with his widow.

Boy, get Conan Doyle on the phone, quick.

(*Munising, Mich., News*)

An unknown man standing on the corner of Elm and Superior Streets was hit by a rocket which went between his legs and becoming entangled in his overcoat exploded up his back. He immediately departed for parts unknown.

Watch and see where the stick comes down.

(*Elkader, Iowa, Democrat*)

Bathing in Turkey river seems to be the most popular pastime of most of our young people during the hot weather, the most popular place being about a mile above the mill dam. This will account for the dirty condition of the river below.

It saves messing up the bath-tub on Saturday nights, anyway.

(*Moorhead, Minn., Independent*)

Nich Diede had a bad luck last Saturday while he went to hitch a pulverizer on and hitched two horses on and wanted to tie the others on them while he had tied one on and wanted to tie the other on that side turned over the hind side and came under the pulverizer and cut his hind legs till in the bones so the animal had to be killed as soon as possible while the others cut themselves barely.

Clear, perfectly clear.

(*Solon, Iowa, Economy*)

The woman who doesn't like this paper because it is no good and never gets anything right, should tuck up her underskirt. It hangs down and looks sloppy. The editor of *The Economy* may not know how to run a newspaper right, but he knows how to put his clothes on so his underwear won't show.

In which the editor said something.

(*Belleville, Ill., Democrat*)

Miss Alice Muir announced her engagement in the paper last week, but she can't never marry my son as long as I have the right over him; he is only 19 years, and besides she ain't welcome in our family and never can step in my house.—Mrs. Dora Deuker.

Alice in *Wonderland*, again.

(*Montour Falls, N. Y., Press*)

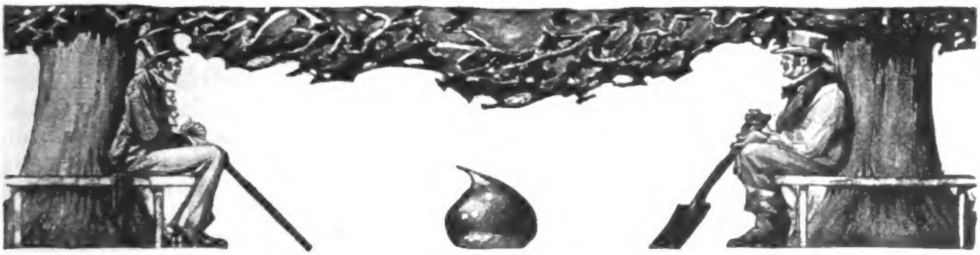
Helen Scanlon, one of our new Cost Department employees, had a fortunate escape from serious injury last week, when she alighted from the trolley car backward and fell on her own responsibility.

Cruel, and distressingly inconvenient.

(*Iowa City Citizen*)

T. A. Brown has recently opened a pool and billiard room in the rear of the front occupied by Prince's flower shop.

Nothing like being exact.



Everybody's Chestnut Tree

Editor's Note: Though the sign is the Chestnut Tree, no story is barred by its youth. We will gladly pay for available ones. Address all manuscripts to "The Chestnut Tree," enclosing stamped addressed envelope.

A MAN walked into a garage where his car was being repaired, and was heard to reprimand the garage owner for telling him how to run his own car, saying: "This is my car, and what I say goes."

A moment later a tired, greasy mechanic looked from under the car and said: "You darned fool, say 'Engine!' "

LITTLE Edith, aged three, could recite three or four rhymes, but sometimes got them slightly mixed. She very sleepily started her prayers one night and dozed off in the middle.

"Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord—my—soul—to—keep."

"If—" prompted mother. Edith awoke with a start and sang out energetically: "If he hollers, let him go. Eeny, meeny, miny, mo!"

EVERYBODY in the village knew Rastus Johnson, and everybody talked to him.

He was working one day for a member of the Ladies' Aid Society, and as he was about to go home she said pleasantly:

"I hear, Rastus, that you've seen the time when President Washington was in office. Is that true?"

Rastus rolled the whites of his eyes and smiled with a sad but reminiscent smile.

"Well, Ah used to seed it, but dat was before pro'bition done went 'to 'fect."

SHE: Now if you were in my shoes, what would you do?

He: Groan with agony.

THE prosecuting attorney was examining a negro witness.

"Now, Mose," he said, "tell us what you know about this fight?"

"Well, boss," began Mose, "I think——"

"I don't want to know what you think. Tell us what you know."

"I think——"

"I told you not to tell us what you think."

"But, boss," said Mose, apologetically, "I ain't no lawyer. I can't talk without thinking."

BLACK SAM was preparing for his wedding when a friend who was to act as best man asked him the name of the lady. Sam hesitated long enough to arouse the ire of the friend.

"You shoah orter know," the best man said impatiently. "You is goin' to marry her."

"Why does you want to know the name ob dat gal?" Sam asked.

" 'Cause I ain't carryin' no money aroun' wid a strange nigger."

A DAYTON, Ohio, man of a musical turn confided to a man from the East that his musical talent had once been the means of saving his life.

"How was that?" asked the Easterner, much interested.

"Why, there was a big flood in my town and when the water struck our house my father got on a bed and floated downstream."

"And you?"

"I accompanied him on the piano."

THE teacher in a San Francisco public school was trying to demonstrate a simple experiment in the generation of steam.

"What have I in my hand?" she asked.

"A tin can," came the answer.

"Very true. Is the can an animate or inanimate object?"

"Inanimate."

"Exactly. Now, can any little boy or girl tell me how, with this can, it is possible to generate a surprising amount of speed and power almost beyond control?"

One little boy raised his hand.

"You may answer, Carter."

"Tie it to a dog's tail."

A CERTAIN young New Zealander, six or seven years old, is very inquisitive. One day he was asking how things came to be here: "Mother, who made me?" The mother replied, "God."

"Who made the horses and cows?"

"God."

"And who made the elephants?"

"Why, God, of course!"

A long pause, then: "Well, did God make flies?"

"Why, yes, my son!"

"Humph!" said the boy. "Fiddling work, flies!"

LITTLE JIMMY, aged six, was sent to bed alone one night. He was scarcely out of the living-room when he ran back, sobbing.

"Why, what's the matter, Jimmy?" asked his mother.

"Oh, muvver, it's dark—and I'm scared!" answered the little chap.

"Why, dear, you know that God is everywhere, even in the dark, don't you?"

The youngster reflected a moment, and then answered, "But, muvver, I w-want something with *skin* on it!"

A NEGRO woman of mammoth proportions and inky complexion was in an automobile accident. She was transported to the hospital, where she soon regained consciousness. The doctor, seeking to comfort her a bit, said to her:

"You will undoubtedly be able to obtain a considerable amount of damages, Mrs. Johnson."

"Damages!" said Mrs. Johnson. "What Ah want wif damages? Ah got enough damages now. What Ah wants is repairs."

"SHINY" had had trouble with his wife and she was suing him for a separation. There was another woman in the case, of course, and Shiny, in doubt as to whether to oppose the suit for separation or sue for divorce, consulted a lawyer.

"How much a divorce cost?" he asked.

"One hundred and fifty dollars."

"How much de separation?"

"Fifty dollars."

"Huh!" said Shiny. "Dar hain't dat much difference between dem two women."

THE old sea captain was surrounded at the tea party, to which his wife had dragged him much against his will, by a group of women pestering him for a story from his adventures. Finally at the end of his patience, he began:

"Once I was shipwrecked on the coast of South America, and there I came across a tribe of wild women who had no tongues."

"Mercy!" cried all the fair listeners with one voice. "But they couldn't talk."

"That," snapped the old sea captain, "was what made them wild."

"OH, PLEASE, Miss Jeanne!" begged the youth earnestly. "Do not call me Mr. Durand."

"But our acquaintance is so short, you know," she said coyly. "Why should I not call you that?"

"Well," the young man replied, "principally because my name is Du Pont!"

PAT had opened his first bank account and had taken to paying most of his debts by check. One day the bank sent him a statement together with a packet of canceled checks. Of the statement Pat made neither head nor tail, but the returned checks greatly excited him.

"Mike!" he said to his friend one day. "Sure an' it's a smart bank I'm doin' business wid, now."

"How's that?" asked Mike.

"Why," was the reply, "Oi paid all me bills wid checks, an' bejabbers if the bank wasn't slick enough to get ivery check back for me again."

"ARE you guilty or not guilty?" asked the magistrate of an Irish prisoner.

"Faith!" replied Pat. "Thot's for a cliver gintleman loike ye to foind out."